

Lechi Strength

How strong must Lechis be? Will this might appear to be a simple matter it is in actuality subject to considerable debate with some very significant implications for best practices regarding community Eruvin.

Gemara and Rishonim

The Gemara (Eruvin 11b) states that the Lechis (side posts) must be sufficiently strong to be able to theoretically support a door (“Berí’ah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash”). The Gemara states that the door to which it refers may even be a minimal one, a door made of straw.

The Terumat HaDeshen (74) notes that this Gemara does not seem to fit with his ruling that a thin layer of lime placed on a wall beneath a wire may serve as a Lechi. How could a thin sheet of lime support even a door of straw? The Terumat HaDeshen answers that the lime in combination with the wall on which it is placed is able to support a door of straw. The Mishna Berura (363:26) and Sha’ar HaTziyun (363:22) present this ruling as normative Halacha.

Three Stages of Lechis Used in North American Eruvin

There have been three basic waves of Lechi building in North America. In the 1970’s and early 1980’s community Eruvin were made at the direction of Rav Moshe Feinstein. These Eruvin utilized forty inch one inch by two inch or two inch by four inch pieces of lumber affixed to the pole beneath the wire. These Lechis undoubtedly meet the “Berí’ah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash” requirement. However, they raise questions as to their precise alignment beneath the wire above them. Therefore, the preference in the mid-1980’s began to shift towards Lechis that extend all the way to the wire.

Application to Half Inch Ground Wire Molding



From the mid-1990's to the mid 2010's the most material used for Lechis were the black half inch grounding wire, such as appears in the picture above. This material is fairly flimsy and raises the question as to whether they truly are "Berí'ah L'Ha'amid Delet Shel Kash". Three approaches have emerged regarding this question.

Rav Baruch Simon (Imrei Baruch, Eruvin UReshuyot, page 142) regards this material as acceptable since combined with the strength of the pole to which it is affixed it is "Berí'ah L'Ha'amid Delet Shel Kash".

Rav Moshe Heinemann (in the Eruv webinar posted on the Star-K website) argues that the door may even be flimsier than straw. He argues that when Chazal say "straw" they mean to say even the most minimal of materials¹. Rav Heinemann stated that a Lechi is acceptable even if could only support a door

¹ Rav Yaakov Bloi (Netivot Shabbat 19:24) also writes that the Delet Shel Kash even refers to a "Delet Kol Shehu", the most minimum of doors.

made of very thin plastic such as the kind used by dry cleaners to cover cleaned suits.

Rav Hershel Schachter (personal communication in 1989), though, is concerned that the half inch grounding wire is not “Berī’ah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash”. He therefore advised that a one inch by two inch piece of wood serve as the bottom ten Tephachim of the Lechi in order that the Lechi be capable of supporting a Delet Shel Kash².

Rav Schachter argues (personal communication) that the ruling of the Terumat HaDeshen cannot be applied to the situation of the half inch grounding wire since this material does not combine to form one entity as do the lime and the wall to which it is applied.

One could respond that indeed the half inch grounding wire and the pole do combine to form one entity even to the extent that they can combine to create a proper Lechi³. Alternatively, one could argue that although the pole and wire do not combine to form a Lechi, the pole strengthens the half inch grounding wire to the extent that it is “Berī’ah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash”.

Two Practical Implications of the Three Approaches

Rav Shmuel Khoshermann reports that Rav Heinemann permits the Atlanta Eruv to rely on an exceedingly thin grounding wire as a Lechi (as pictured below). However, in light of Rav Schachter’s approach, Rav Michael Taubes and I agree that we would not rely upon this in the Teaneck Eruv. We feel that is one thing to argue that the half grounding wire could support a Delet Shel Kash, but quite a big

² Rav Tzvi Fisher, Rosh Kollof of Portland, Oregon, reports that Rav Yaakov Bloi also rules that it suffices for the bottom ten Tephachim to be capable of supporting a Delet Shel Kash. The Sha’ar HaTziyun (363:11, at the end) already raises this as a possibility.

³ Rav Tzvi Sobolofsky (personal communication) raises the possibility that the wire and pole do combine to form one Halachic entity and can together form a Kosher Lechi. According to this suggestion if the wire is broken more than three Tephachim above the ground, the pole to which it is affixed might combine to complete the bottom of the Lechi. Rav Moshe Heinemann (in the Eruv webinar posted on the Star-K website) specifically rejects this approach. He understands the Magen Avraham (363:28) to be teaching that the Lechi must appear as a side post in order to serve as a Lechi. Since the pole or a tree do not appear to be combining to form a single entity they do not combine to create an acceptable Lechi.

leap to argue that such an exceedingly thin wire could be defined as “Berī’ah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash”.



In addition, since it appears that Rav Baruch Simon’s is the most accepted approach to the half inch grounding wire, those responsible for maintaining community Eruvin should be careful to properly fasten this wire to the pole, especially in regards to the bottom of ten Tephachim of the wire⁴. This is a fairly frequent occurrence and Eruv inspectors should be alerted to monitor this carefully.

The New Approach - Half Inch and One Inch Conduit

Since the mid-2010’s it has become common to attach half inch or one inch conduit to serve as Lechis on utility poles (as pictured below). One the one hand they have the practical advantage of blending into the poles as such material is used by linemen on utility poles.

On the other hand, they have a significant advantage in that they are much easier to detect and inspect than the black half inch grounding wire. Many Eruv inspectors view this innovation as facilitating a dramatic improvement in both the ease and quality of inspection.

⁴ The u-bolts that attach the half inch grounding wire to the utility pole often become detached from the pole.

There is also a distinct Halachic advantage to using this material as it appears significantly sturdier than the half inch grounding wire. Therefore it appears to satisfy Rav Schachter's standards for "Beriah L'Ha'amid Delet Shel Kash". Thus, the members of the Teaneck Eruv Rabbinic Board consent to rely on conduit even for the bottom ten Tephachim of the Lechi⁵. Nonetheless, it is still worthwhile for Eruv inspectors to monitor that the Lechi (especially its bottom ten Tephachim) remain fastened to the utility pole.



Conclusion

Rav Hershel Schachter once told me that there is precious little discussion in the Gemara about Tzurot HaPetach. Most of the issues are left to the Achronim to address. However, the fact that the Gemara mentions the issue of

⁵ Previously in Teaneck, wooden slabs were installed as the bottom ten Tephachim of each Lechi, in conformity with Rav Schachter's opinion.

“Beriah L’Ha’amid Delet Shel Kash”, indicates that it is an issue of considerable importance and one regarding which it is definitely worthwhile adopting a stringent approach.