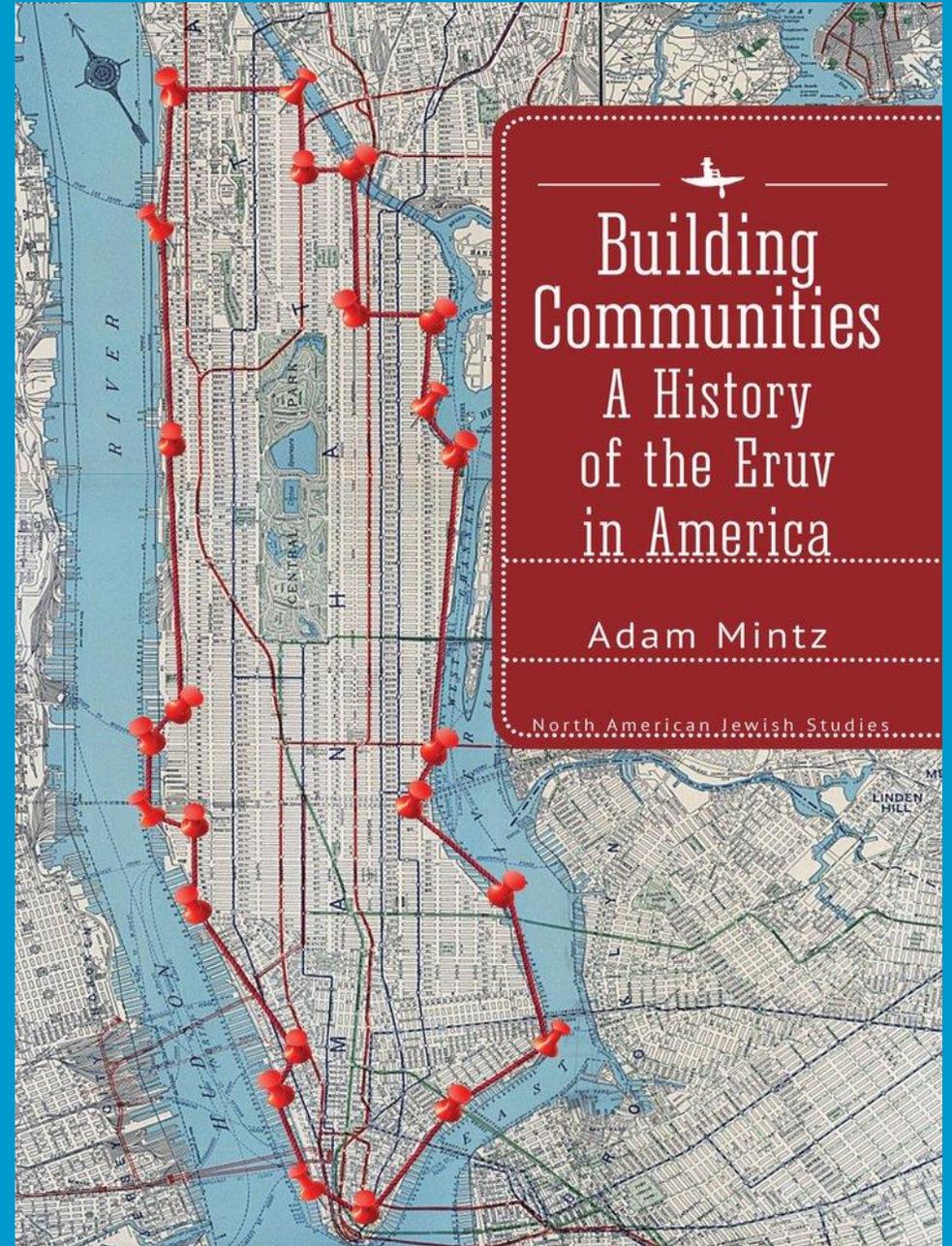


The Eruv in Manhattan



The Rabbinic Committee for the Eruv, 1949

December 27, 1949

Dear Rabbis,

We are presenting you with the following article written as a suggestion for the creation of an eruv around Manhattan by one of the members of the Vaad Harabonim of New York, who has worked on this article and seeks our reactions. [This refers to Rabbi Menahem Tzvi Eisenstadt together with another article on the topic by Rabbi Menahem Seigel Pollak.]

Therefore, it is our desire to receive the approbations of other Torah giants so that we may begin this work immediately to establish an eruv in Manhattan so that thousands and tens of thousands will not violate the laws of the Sabbath. . . .

If anyone has any suggestions, they should mail them to our most important colleague, Rabbi Yonatan Steif, at the above address. In order to facilitate this process, if we do not receive your reply within ten days, we will record you as agreeing with this proposal.

Vaad Le-Ma'an Ha-Eruv Be-Manhattan Nu York

[Committee for the Sake of the Manhattan Eruv, New York]¹⁴

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on the Eruv

Rabbi Feinstein elaborated on this theme and explained that in America where there is indoor plumbing and the shuls are well stocked with books, there is no need for a community eruv. However, he concluded, "If there are those who still believe that there is need for an eruv for the sake of the children and for those who violate Shabbat unintentionally, I do not object, but I do not participate."

In a letter to Rabbi Leo Jung, rabbi of the Jewish Center on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, dated December 16, 1960, Rabbi Feinstein reiterated his refusal to condemn those who supported the eruv even though he would not participate in the project. In this letter he explained his reasons for not participating. "Even though there would be an advantage for those who are carrying on Shabbat... there would be a disadvantage for those who want to conduct themselves according to the halakhah and not carry in Manhattan who might now be inclined to carry."

Rabbi Henkin on the Eruv:

In a letter dated July 12, 1961, Rabbi Henkin outlined his position. He wrote that it is crucial to complete the eruv in Manhattan and that Manhattan is not worse than other cities where an eruv has been established. He explained that the committee was waiting for approbations from other rabbis and then would convene a conference of rabbis to finalize the eruv project. Rabbi Henkin disapproved of waiting for a rabbinic conference as he wrote, "For I know from experience that it takes much time to gather the rabbis. Rather, make the necessary repairs and then announce that the repairs have been made and that the rabbis are supervising the eruv." He noted that until the committee received the approbation of the majority of the rabbis, the eruv remained one that can only be relied upon in times "of great need." He then listed the situations he considered to be "of great need."

1. For the sake of women and children who want to go outside, especially in the summer months.
2. For the sake of doctors who need to carry on behalf of patients who are not in life threatening situations.
3. For the sake of those who need to carry on the Shabbat ritual of Succot to the succah.

Meeting of Agudath Ha-Rabbanim, 1962

In the meeting of the Agudath Ha-Rabbanim that took place on Wednesday, Parashat Beha'alotcha, the 18th of Sivan, 5762, it was decided to publicly announce the decision already made by the Agudath Ha-Rabbanim that it is absolutely forbidden to establish an eruv in Manhattan and that it is forbidden to carry in Manhattan even after the repairs that have been made or that will be made by some rabbis. Whoever relies on the Manhattan eruv is considered a Shabbat violator.

Aharon Kotler
Yaakov Kamenetsky
Gedalia Halevi Schorr
Chaim Bick
Moshe Feinstein

Rabbi Haskel
Lookstein,
2005

After months of discussion, it appears that the Manhattan eruv which was established over fifty years ago can no longer be maintained as a proper eruv. The problem is not halakhic but rather structural. Many changes have taken place over the last decade or two which make it extremely difficult to maintain the kashrut of the eruv. The necessary improvements to bring the eruv up to the standards that Rabbi Kasher, of blessed memory, established would be very expensive to make and, in any event, the nature of traffic and construction in Manhattan make it virtually impossible to assure the kashrut of the eruv on any given Shabbat.

Rabbi Simon
Schwab on
the Eruv, 1960

Everyone agrees that it is a great mitzvah to establish eruvin to prevent Sabbath violation. However, in this time and especially in this country, which is corrupted by arrogance and ignorance, at a time when the ignorant have taken control and young people stand in the place of elders and are not embarrassed to misrepresent the Torah we must consider the problems that could arise and the destruction that might come from this innovation.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe on the Eruv, 1964

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Rabbi
New York, NY

Shalom u'Brachah:

My brother-in-law, RSG, informed me yesterday of your desire to discuss with me, in the presence of your colleagues, the question of an eiruv for Manhattan. Although, because of the sanctity of Chol Hamoed, my correspondence is generally suspended during these intermediate days, I hasten to convey to you my views on this matter.

As you will surely recall, the matter was raised a few years ago, when I expressed my position, which has not changed. However, since I do not know if you are fully informed of it, I will reiterate the main points of my viewpoint relative to this matter:

First of all, as a matter of principle, my opinion is that where according to the *din* an eiruv can be instituted, it should be so instituted. This is based on the opinion of many *posekim*, including that of Admur Hazaken in his *Shulchan Aruch*.

Secondly, special consideration has to be given to the state of affairs and attitudes in respect to the observance of the *mitzvot* in the present day and age, which has a particular bearing on the problem under discussion. I have in mind the precaution which such an eiruv calls for under the best of circumstances, and certainly here and now, against the possibility of the eiruv becoming *pasul*. In the old days, when there was a close contact between the Jewish community ("the man in the street") and the *Beit Din* or *Rav*, the invalidation of the eiruv, and the consequent resumption of the pre-eiruv state of the prohibition against carrying on *Shabbat*, could be communicated fairly easily to the "man in the street" and no harm was done. Nowadays, unfortunately, the position is different. While the institution of the eiruv would quickly become common knowledge, not only through various media of communication but also by word of mouth, the rescinding of it in case of its invalidation would only reach those who are in contact with the Rabbinical authorities, or who attend the synagogue regularly; whereas many would remain in ignorance of the changed situation. Moreover, those who might get into the habit of carrying on *Shabbat* on the strength of an eiruv, might not so readily discontinue doing so even if they became aware of the breakdown in the eiruv; and this contingency is particularly to be considered in relation to the Jewish youth in this country.

In view of the above, it is an absolute necessity, in my opinion, that the eiruv, if one is feasible at all according to *din*, should be carried out in the utmost secrecy. This means that the purpose of the eiruv would be not to enable a Jew to carry his *talit* to *shul* on *Shabbat*, but only to relieve those who already

