SHABBAT: the ‘erub debate (Part 1)

We are reviewing the melakha called *hotza-a*, “transferring” on Shabbat from one domain to another domain (see **here**) and as an extension of it carrying an object in the public domain (see **this**).
In our days the most controversial issue in regards to *hotza-a* is the matter of the *‘erub*, i.e., an enclosure which turns a public domain into a private domain.
This is not an easy subject to explain, so I will go step by step.
As we have said, the Tora forbids to carry in a public domain. But, what is considered a public domain? Everyone agrees that the point of reference is the camp of the Children of Israel in the Sinai desert. As we have explained, the bringing of elements and goods from people’s private “huts” to build a *mishkan* was called melakha (see link above).
The first Halakhic debate thus, has to do with the different views of what made the area of the *mishkan* a public domain.
Briefly: for one opinion it is the width of the street or corridor where the dismantled *mishkan* was carried on wide wagons (‘agalot). That corridor was 16 amot wide (approximately 25 feet).
For a second opinion, it was the fact that 600,000 people would usually flow within that area what made it a public domain, not just the width of the corridor. (This point could be also explained in different terms: is the street wide enough to allow in theory a traffic of 600,000 people? Any corridor which is narrower than 16 amot is not!)
Now, we may begin to understand the partial consequences of this controversy: following the first opinion then any street (and its surrounding areas) which is 25 feet wide or wider is considered a Biblical public domain. Regardless of the amount of traffic on that street.
However, for the second opinion, if there is no an actual 600,000 people traffic, that area is not considered a Biblical public domain but *karmelit* a semi-public domain, i.e., it does not have **all** the conditions of a public domain. Carrying in *karmelit* is still not permitted, but 1. it is categorized as a rabbinical (not Biblical) prohibition and 2. as we will explain BH in the coming weeks, it allows more flexibility to be enclosed with a standard ‘erub (*besurat petah*).
To be continued…

Shabbat Shalom!

Candle lightning in NYC: 7.41 pm

Shabbat ends in NYC: 8:42 pm