

Introduction to Tractate ‘Erubin

The Torah at Exo. 16:29 defines the Sabbath in part by sending Israel to its tents on that occasion. Repose involves entry into a stationary condition. The Israelites are to stay in their place on the Sabbath day. Each person has a place, defined as four [square] cubits (enough for a burial plot), and may move from that place for the distance of two thousand cubits in any direction. The law in ‘*Erubin* focuses on the verses, Exo. 16:29–30, that link the act of eating with the locus of residence: “See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days; remain every man of you in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.” The juxtaposition of a double supply of bread for Friday and Saturday in addition to the admonition to remain in one’s place leaves no doubt that (1) one stays home, on the one hand, and that (2) home is where one eats, on the other. Here is the topical outline of the tractate.

- I. The delineation of a limited domain
 - A. Forming an alleyway into a single domain
 - B. Forming an area occupied by a caravan into a single domain for the Sabbath
 - C. A well in public domain
- II. The ‘*erub* and the Sabbath-limit of a town
 - A. The ‘*erub*: A symbolic meal for establishing joint ownership of a courtyard or for establishing symbolic residence for purposes of travel on the Sabbath
 - B. The ‘*erub* and violating the Sabbath-limit
 - C. Defining the Sabbath-limit of a town
- III. The ‘*erub* and commingling ownership of a courtyard or an alleyway
 - A. The ‘*erub* and the courtyard
 - B. Areas that may be deemed either distinct from one another or as a commingled domain so that the residents have the choice of preparing a joint ‘*erub* or two separate ones
 - C. The *shittuf* and the alleyway
 - D. Neglecting the ‘*erub* for a courtyard
 - E. An ‘*erub* for more than one courtyard
 - F. The ‘*erub* and the area of roofs
- IV. Public domain in general

The tractate addresses the problems: How can Israelites on the Sabbath move about from one private domain to another? How can the community so arrange matters that shared and common ownership of private domain secures for all parties the right to carry within the space held in common? One answer is for the community to prepare a symbolic, or fictive, meal, a meal that commingles ownership of property, because where one eats, there one resides. By sharing property among all the partners in the meal, the right to said

meal and property is shared by all. All householders thereby commingle their property rights, so that joint property will then form a single common estate from the various private domains. Another answer is to establish a boundary around the entire set of private domains, one that, like a wall, forms of them all a single property. The medium by which the one or the other procedure is carried out is called an *'erub*, a medium of commingling, thus referring either to the symbolic, shared meal or to the equally fictive demarcation line, as the case requires: a meal of commingling, or a boundary-marker for commingling ownership of private property.