

Random Publication of the Day: Beach Mechitzah

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In the spirit of enjoying the summer while it lasts, a little beach reading:

The Rise and Washout of a Jewish Beach (Lionel Sasson, **Sh'ma**, 1978)

Rabbi Lazar Kahanow of the Young Israel of Long Beach Synagogue... approached members of the city council with an idea to attract Orthodox residents during the summer months. He asked if it was somehow possible to modify one of the city's twenty eight beaches so that there might be separate bathing areas for men and women. He explained that "lighdy attired men and women bathing together is a violation of the Orthodox laws of modesty." He stated that at least one thousand of the city's residents have been disenfranchised from the beaches by the presence of mixed bathing. He cited the city of Boston which built separate bathing facilities for men and women which are utilized chiefly by the large Irish Catholic population...

...The City of New York, bowing to public pressure, recently unofficially designated a part of Riis Park in the Rockaways for nude bathing. The segregationists' viewpoint was that if the nudists could have a nude bathing beach, it was downright obscene not to permit others a place to bathe in modesty...

...Local controversy, much of it within the local Jewish population had dampened Rabbi Kahanow's plans. There was fear that vigilantes, who could only be asked voluntarily to leave since the beach remained a public one, would invade the women's section. The males feared that their section might become a loitering place for homosexuals. Outside J.D.L. factions threatened that they would come to keep the peace. Others voiced fear that the beach would become a target for antisemitism. Rabbi Kahanow maintained that if the congregants ignored the invaders and trouble makers, the trouble would leave the way it came...

...At 8 o'clock on Thursday, June 30, a small yellow bulldozer from a private contractor rambled onto Lincoln Beach and started digging out sand from under the boardwalk to create a new beach entrance. Few realized what was going on until Rabbi Kahanow appeared on the boardwalk to give his blessings to the construction. Alex Safer, a local builder and advisor to the Rabbi, explained the drawing card aspect of the project to one irate bystander concluding vehemently, "We are not moving, we are going to fight." Replied the bystander, "Mentals or the religious, so what's the difference?"...

...When installation was nearing completion, Tom Daly, Asst. to the Chief of Lifeguards, arrived to inspect the proceedings. Upon wishing the Rabbi well, he insightfully pointed out that unless holes were cut into the fence to relieve water pressure that would build up with the pounding of the waves, the wall would be knocked down. The Rabbi protested saying that additional

holes would subtract from the privacy of the fence. After some discussion the fence foreman decided to cut small 1" holes into every other slot. For this he needed a small generator which he insisted on the Rabbi procuring. Several phone calls later the Rabbi announced that one could be borrowed from the city. The fence installers boarded their truck saying they were going to get the generator and were never seen again...

...Hostility increased as more fence went up. Shouts of "Tear it down," and "Burn Fort Zion," brought patrol cars much of the day. City Council President Harvey Weisenberg, unaware that the beach was actually being built, was alerted by numerous phone calls at his residence and came for a first hand look. Waved to from the beach, he yelled back angrily, "No, no, no, not here." For a moment it looked as though he was going to descend to the beach and tear it down board by board. At City Hall complaints jammed the switchboard...

...The tide started rising at four o'clock. A weak low pressure front clouded the skies and started sending in small swells. On the beach a lone patron chatted with the lifeguard while the crowd on the boardwalk became larger and more belligerent. At four thirty five a loud cracking sound was heard. All heads turned to the middle of the beach where the first waves from the incoming tide had reached the stockade. Like wind whipping through wheat, the fence swayed with every passing wave. The bulge of the wave traveled from one end of the fence to the other, the pieces popping out to permit the flow of water. The bottom of the fence loosened first, the nails pulled out from the wooden piling. The wood sections flapped in the wind for a second before the next wave pulled them down. Large holes appeared in the fence as sections dropped into the water and floated in the surf. The crowd cheered. At the breaker line the ominous humps of several outside large waves could be seen building. They moved in with tremendous speed. The first ones shook the remaining wall. The middle ones crashed into the piling with tons of water. By the last waves the wood was smashed to splinters...

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