zekher lahurban: Remembering His house in our homes

As we have explained yesterday, the Rabbis enacted a number of ordinances in order to remind us of the destruction of the Holy Temple. The underlying principle is that when a person has the good fortune of arriving at some occasion that gives him a sense of gratification, he must remember that his joy is incomplete, for the Temple still lies in ruins.

Therefore, the sages instituted that when a person builds a house for himself and arrives at its final stage, the whitewashing of the walls, he must remember that the house of the nation, the Holy Temple, still lies in ruins. And in remembrance of the destruction of the Holy Temple he must leave a square cubit of wall unwhitewashed.

A cubit is approximately half a meter, or 1.5 ft, and therefore, in practice, a square half meter of wall must be left without whitewash. Similarly, if a person covers his walls with wallpaper, he must leave a square half meter of wall without whitewash and without wallpaper. If possible, the unwhitewashed space should be situated on the wall opposite the entrance so that whoever enters the house can see it.

When one does not build a house but buys a house from someone else, does he need to scrape off some of the wall in order to uncover a square cubit?

It depends. If the person who built the house was a Jew, he was obligated to leave a square cubit of wall unwhitewashed. Therefore, If he did not do so, the buyer must now scrape off the whitewash. However, if the original owner was a non-Jew, he was not obligated to leave an unwhitewashed area, and the buyer is exempt from scraping off a square cubit of whitewash (shulhan ‘arukh, OH 560:1. For more details read **here** Rabbi E. Melamed, penine halakha).

I think that in this last case and in every other case when technically there is no obligation to scrape off the wall, it would be proper to hang a picture or a decorative painting of Yerushalayim or the Bet haMiqdash to educate ourselves and our children to remember the Hurban.

Shabbat Shalom!

Candle lighting in NYC: 8:03 pm

Shabbat ends in NYC: 9:03 pm

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by Noah Beck