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לעשות רצונך
בלבב שלם



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Remembering the Churban

Matos-Masei 5786

385

Remembering the Churban

Introduction

1. When the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, many Jews wanted to decree actual aveilus on themselves by not eating meat or drinking wine, as those were brought on the Mizbeiach. R' Yehoshua responded (גמ' ב"ב דף ס' ע"ב), "A gezeira may not be made for the tzibbur unless the majority of the tzibbur can handle it." Thus, instead of absolute aveilus, Chazal instituted limited, yet constant, takanos, particularly regarding matters of joy. These serve as a memory of the Churban literally in our daily life, in fulfillment of the posuk "אם לא אעלה את ירושלם על ראש שמחת" (שמואל ב' כ"ד). These pertain to the house, meals, women's jewelry, and a chosson's joy.
2. These takanos are fixed in halacha and apply at all times, in all places, to this day, as is clear from Shulchan Aruch (א"ח סי' תקס). Since Chazal instituted these decrees, obviously the majority of the tzibbur can in fact handle them. Thus, we must be meticulous about them. Even if we only bear the sin of not mourning Yerushalayim properly, that is enough to extend our galus (סידור ר' יעקב עמדין, שער שלכת שער הדלק חלק ו' אות ט"ז).

One Square Amah in the House

Zecher l'Churban

3. After the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the Chachamim of that generation decreed that when one builds a house, plasters it, and whitewashes it with lime, he must leave over a one-square-amah area on the house without lime to remember the Churban (ש"ע סי' א"א (תק"ס ס"א). In other words, there is a chiyuv to leave an area on the wall that does not have the desired finish so that it is noticeably lacking and flawed. This causes us to constantly remember we are missing something much bigger: the great, awe-inspiring Beis Hamikdash.

Applies Everywhere

4. **Chutz l'Aretz.** Everyone agrees this halacha applies everywhere in Chutz l'Aretz; there is not a single opinion that holds it does not.
5. **Yerushalayim.** Some cite a minhag not to require making reminders of the Churban in the Old City of Yerushalayim, since the residents constantly see the Churban with their own eyes (שלעזינגער בעל לב העברי, סי' הבית מילואים עמ' תפ"ד בשם הגר"מ הלברשטאם).
6. However, most poskim hold there is no such distinction, and even in the Old City of Yerushalayim one must leave over an amah of the house to remember the Churban (ס' א"א סי' כ"ג ס"ד).
7. **Eretz Yisroel.** Some hold this halacha only applies in Chutz l'Aretz, as it demonstrates we do not have true acquisitions in Chutz l'Aretz. We only live there temporarily; we do not plan to permanently reside there (בשם מדרש תלפיות ערך בנין מהרש"א ב"ב דף ס' ע"ב, סי' הבית סי' י"ט הע' א').
8. However, most poskim do not differentiate. They hold it also applies in Eretz Yisroel (ש"ת אדו בדבר ח"ו סי' ע"ג).

Minhag in the Past

9. Many houses do not have an unfinished square amah to remember the Churban. The question is: what is the basis for this? Multiple Acharonim attested that the contemporary minhag was not to leave an unfinished space (מ"ב שם סק"ב), but many Acharonim wondered about the basis for this heter, which has gotten to the point that this halacha is virtually forgotten by Eretz Yisroel without a valid reason (קיצור שו"ע סי' קצ"ו (קכ"ו ס"א, נשמת אדם כלל קל"ז סק"א, מ"ב שם). We find multiple angles of heter in the Acharonim, and we must discuss whether there truly is basis to rely on, as will be explained.

10. **Limestone mixed with sand.** Some are meikel to say the whole chiyuv to leave unfinished space is only when whitewashing with lime. If, however, sand is mixed with lime, it is not called "lime," which carries a chiyuv to leave unfinished space. Thus, there is no need to leave anything unfinished. Some explain this is what earlier generations relied on not to leave unfinished space since they mixed sand with lime (נשמת אדם, מ"ב שם).
11. However, some wonder about this rationale, as people today use just lime without sand—again, what do they rely on not to leave anything unfinished? (מ"ב שם).
12. **Very white lime.** Some propose another possible reason people are meikel: the issur is only with a very white type of lime. The lime that people used, though, was not so white, so perhaps there is no chiyuv to leave unfinished space (מ"ב שם). However, this is also dismissed, as it does not make sense they only made the issur on very white lime (מ"ב שם).
13. **Non-Jews are particular.** Some cite as a reason for the common practice of heter that we live among non-Jews, and they insist houses must be completely whitewashed (אורחות חיים). Obviously, this reason does not apply today whatsoever. Even if they are particular about the appearance of houses, that is only for the exterior. For the interior, each person can do what he wants. Thus, this is not a valid reason whatsoever for heter today.
14. **Liquid whitewash.** Some suggest the reason people are meikel is because Chazal only instituted a chiyuv to leave unfinished space when applying solid lime. They did not make a chiyuv to leave unfinished space when applying liquid whitewash, which has been in use since recent times, as it merely looks like lime but is not actually lime (ש"ת התעוררות תשובה ח"א סי' קס"ד).
15. However, the Acharonim do not agree with this either, as we do not find Chazal made such a distinction.

In Practice

16. Since this is a clear halacha paskened in Shulchan Aruch, and the fact that many people do not do it surprised and pained the leading poskim (above, 9); and we have seen there is no room for the reasons used to be meikel (10-15); this important halacha should be restored to its original status and followed properly. Many earlier gedolim did this (הגה"ק מוטשאטש, הגה"ק מבעלזא הובא בש"ת) (הגה"ק מצאנו משכנות הרועים סי' ח"י, הגה"ק חת"ס מנהגי חת"ס החדש פ"ג סכ"א, הגה"ק מצאנו אחרי שעודד אותו הגר"ה מקאלאמייע לזה, הגה"ק מסאטמאר, החזו"א והקהילות (יעקב ועוד).
17. **Mark for the Beis Hamikdash in our houses.** Thus, everyone should be careful about this going forward. Even if we did not do so before today, from today and on the matter should be rectified, both in Eretz Yisroel (8) and Chutz l'Aretz (4), and certainly in the summer homes people have in various places.
18. Let us think for a moment. For every small fix or minor flaw in our houses, we rush to bring in professionals and pay money so that our houses are beautiful and fixed up. If so, it is that much more incumbent upon us to invest in fixing up our houses to found them on meticulousness in halacha, even if it costs a bit of money.
19. How are we able to live in our comfortable houses, which stretch over hundreds and even thousands of square amos of beauty and spaciousness, without leaving a small unfinished space of one square amah without plaster in memory of the Churban? The Beis Hamikdash and the Shechina's honor are worth us feeling pain over them, as we should. Let us express in our private homes the yearning for the rebuilding of Hashem's House, במהרה בימינו.

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Opening times: Sun. – Thurs. 5:00pm till 8:00pm | Fri. 10:00am till 11:00am and from 1 hour before candle-lighting

Size of the "Zecher l'Churban Space"

20. **Modern-day measurements.** The "zecher l'Churban space" must be one amah by one amah. In modern terms, that is 48x48 cm [19x19 in.] (הגר"ח נאה) or 58x58 cm [23x23 in.] (החזו"א). Since this halacha is d'Rabanan, one may l'chatchila use Rav Chaim Naeh's smaller measurement (הליכות אבן ישראל עמ' שפ"ה).
21. **Square.** The area left unfinished must specifically be a 1x1 amah square, not a longer, narrower space, even if the total area is one square amah (לפי"ג משב"ז סק"א הובא בשע"ת). In a case where there is not enough room on the wall to make an amah-high square, e.g., between the top of the door and the ceiling, one may combine the space on the wall with some of the ceiling to get to the one-amah measurement and leave both without plaster (ש"ת משכנת הרועים) (סי' ח"י, הגר"ש קלוגר שם).

Location

22. **Opposite the entrance.** L'chatchila the unfinished square amah should be opposite the entrance, in keeping with the wording of the Gemara and poskim (גמ' ב"ב דף ס' ע"ב, רמב"ם פ"ה תענית ה"ב, שו"ע) (שם). This means on the wall facing the entrance so that one sees it right when he enters the house.
23. **Over the entrance.** Some leave the space over the entrance. It is not seen immediately upon entering, but it is visible to a person sitting in the room opposite the entrance. There is a reliable basis for this minhag (שע"ת, הובא במ"ב שם סק"ג, מנהגי חת"ס).
24. **Side wall.** If there is no option to leave an unfinished space by the entrance, it may also be left on a side wall that can be seen when entering the house or from inside the house.
25. **Between two doors.** If a house has two doorways at the entrance, one further in than the other with a small foyer between them, the space should be left on a wall facing the inner door, not between the two doors. This is because the area between the doors is not considered a dwelling space (הגר"ש"א). However, some hold it may be left there too, especially if there is nowhere else for it (הליכות אבן ישראל).
26. **Stairwell.** When there are multiple residential units in a building, leaving a square amah in the stairwell does not work to exempt all the residents from leaving a space in each of their apartments, as it is not in their houses.
27. **Shared unit.** If there was a single apartment that the landlord divided into two, and he left the unfinished square amah in its original place, which is now inside the first door but in the small foyer between the private entrance doors to each smaller unit, some hold they are yotzei the chiyuv with this, and the tenants do not need to leave a space in each smaller unit (מור"ד בעל שבט הקה"ת).
28. However, others hold since there is a separate chiyuv on every house, the small foyer is considered a shared courtyard, so they are not yotzei their chiyuv to remember the Churban there.

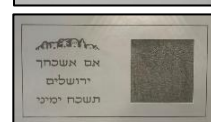
Various Building Materials

29. **Coating with plaster.** In the past, they used plaster and lime to coat stone walls. Thus, the halacha is that if a wall is only finished with plaster to level and insulate it but its appearance is dull, rough, and unappealing, Chazal did not require an unfinished space to remember the Churban, as the whole house looks like a sort of ruin and does not inspire extra joy.
30. **Whitewashing with lime.** However, use of lime whitewash, i.e., the white, aesthetic coating they applied over plaster, is the finish for a house's beauty and a display of wealth and comfort. Chazal decreed one must leave an unfinished space in the whitewash layer to remember the Churban.
31. **Cement.** In modern construction, the material used is called טיח [a sort of rough base plaster], made from sand and cement. This clearly has the status of "coating with plaster" (above, 29).
32. **White plaster.** Today, something called טיח לבן [a skim coat or finish plaster] is used as a final layer that provides a smooth finish for the wall. This is the layer before the paint, but it is also white and smooth. Since there is sometimes nearly no visible difference between this layer and the final, white-painted wall, one should leave an unfinished space to remember the Churban in this layer too (פוסקי זמננו). However, if the wall will be painted a different color, and leaving a space without paint will be noticeable, there is no need to leave a space without white plaster; just without paint.
33. **Paint.** The final coat used today is the paint. Although it is not a lime whitewash, since it is the final coat in the wall's finish in modern aesthetics, it has the status of lime whitewash, so a square amah should be left unpainted to remember the Churban. This is because the main idea is not to put the final, finishing touches on a space in the wall (ש"ת מנחת יצחק).
34. **Drywall/Plaster-board.** One should also leave an unfinished space to remember the Churban on drywall/plaster-board. Usually, it is coated in a joint compound layer ["שפכטל"] and then painted. If just leaving a space unpainted is noticeable, that is enough. However, if the color of the paint is similar to that of the joint compound over the drywall, one should also leave off some of the joint compound layer.

35. **Wallpaper.** A square amah must also be left unfinished when pasting wallpaper onto a wall, as that is the finish in that house that must have a bare space (ערוה"ש ס"ה, מ"ב סק"ג, כפה"ח סק"ט).
36. **Marble, wood covering.** Similarly, when a wall is covered with marble or wood panels, a square amah must also be left bare to remember the Churban, as that is the finish for that house.

Alternative Methods

37. The process mentioned in the poskim is leaving out some of the actual whitewash when applying the wall finish coat with the goal of displaying an incompleteness in the beauty. A flawed wall reminds a person about the Churban. However, apparently some people preferred not having a bare, ugly wall in their houses, so they searched for alternative methods to fulfill the halacha to remember the Churban. We will now go through some of them.
38. **Painting a square amah black.** Some people painted a square amah with black paint to symbolize aveilus (אי"ר בשם האגודה, הובא במ"ב סק"ג), because they thought the decree was to make a reminder of the Churban in the house with an amah measurement, not necessarily in the form of something missing in the wall itself (ש"ת אג"מ אורח ח"ג סי' פ"ו).
39. However, many poskim dismiss this minhag, as the decree was in the form of something missing in the wall itself, not just a black design or black paint as a reminder of aveilus (ח"י אדם, מ"ב סק"ג). Some add onto the black background the words "זכר לחורבן"; one should not object to those who are meikel with this (שע"ת סק"ה). [I remember from my youth that in the home of the TChabe Rov of London, there was a wall completely covered with whitewash, and there was a one square amah frame over the living room door with black paint lines inside, creating a stone pattern.]
40. **Decorating the square amah.** Some decorate the square amah, turning the bare space for the Churban into a decorative design element with etchings or painted images, e.g., the Beis Hamikdash, or pesukim, e.g., "אם אשכחך" or "ירושלים". We must distinguish between two types.
41. If the picture is within the square amah, it destroys the reminder of the Churban, as the whole space is converted into an element of beauty—this does not fulfill Chazal's chiyuv. [It symbolizes yearning for the Geula, but it does not remind us of the Churban; Chazal's takana was specifically for the Churban (above, 3), or at least aveilus (38).] However, if the design is outside the area of the square amah, one should not object, as the square amah itself has the form of a flaw in the wall, only with writing around it.
42. **Amah with designed bricks.** Some people leave a square amah space made from designed bricks. Since this style is common for decoration and beauty today, this does not fulfill Chazal's chiyuv to leave something bare to remember the Churban.



Baal Habayis

43. **Bought house from non-Jew.** If a Jew bought a plastered house from a non-Jew, he does not need to scrape a layer off the wall to create a memory of the Churban, as the house was completed permissibly by a non-Jew (שו"ע סי' תקס"א). However, if the Jew will whitewash or paint the house in the future, when he does so he must leave an unfinished space to remember the Churban (שו"ת ערוגת הבשם קעט).
44. **Bought house from Jew.** If one bought a house which a Jew lived in but without an unfinished space, the buyer must scrape a layer to create an unfinished space to remember the Churban, as the chiyuv was already in effect for the prior resident (מ"ב סק"ד).
45. **Bought from a Jewish contractor.** Some hold that when a Jew buys a finished, plastered house from a Jewish contractor, the contractor does not have a chiyuv to leave an unfinished space, and accordingly, the Jewish buyer also does not have a chiyuv since the house was completed permissibly (שו"ת אג"מ אורח ח"ג סי' פ"ו). However, if the Jew will paint the house for himself later or if the contractor involves him in choosing the original color, he must leave an unfinished space.
46. **Renting from a Jew.** If one rents from a Jew, the landlord does not need to leave a space to remember the Churban, as it is not the house he lives in (שו"ת אג"מ שם). Some say the tenant likewise has no chiyuv to leave a space, as it is not his house (שו"ת אג"מ). However, most poskim hold the tenant has a chiyuv to scrape a space on the wall (חזו"א, ארחות רבינו ח"ב עמ' קמ"ח, הגר"ש"א תורת) (המועדים סק"ה). He should first ask the landlord for permission, and the Jewish landlord should not prevent the tenant from fulfilling a halacha in Shulchan Aruch. In the event the tenant anyway must paint the house when his lease is up, he must scrape a space to leave unfinished.

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