



Ask The Rabbi...

Researched at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College
22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, 91180 Jerusalem, Israel
tel:972-2-810315 • fax:972-2-812890 • Internet:ohr@jer1.co.il



February 11, 1995
Issue #55

This edition contains:

1. Flax in Sheep's Clothing – *Shatnez*
2. This Week's Riddle

Charna S. Klein @seattleu.edu wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is it not permitted to mix wool and linen in garments?

Dear Charna S. Klein,

The Torah states that it is forbidden to wear a garment which contains wool and linen. Many commentaries cite this commandment as an example of a "chok" – a statute – a *mitzvah* that has no readily evident reason. Our observance of this type of *mitzvah* shows our belief in G-d and His Torah even though we do not understand everything. We realize that not everything is in our grasp, and nonetheless we adhere to all of the Torah. However, if one researches this subject, one comes across various reasons suggested for this prohibition.

Maimonides explains that it was customary for priests of religions which practiced *Avodah Zara* (idol worship) to wear special garments made out of wool & linen. He adds that even in his time the priests in Egypt wore this type of clothing.

The **Rosh** says that the *Parochet* — a separating curtain used in the Temple — was made from wool and linen, and the Torah did not want us to wear anything similar to the holy *Parochet*. This is similar to the prohibition against making an exact replication of the *Ketoret* (incense) not for the purpose of the Temple service.

He cites another interesting reason: Cain killed Abel as an outcome of these two species. Cain offered flax-linen and Abel brought an offering from his "woolly" sheep. We are therefore instructed not to join those two types of material as a constant reminder of this incident -- and will thereby take care not to cause separation and hate between people.

The **Zohar** (Kabbalistic work) teaches that the Biblical word for this combination, "*Shatnez*," can be separated into two words "*Satan Az*," meaning "the *Satan* is strong." The Zohar also states that when someone wears *Shatnez* an "evil spirit" lurks within him, just as in the time of Cain & Abel where the fusion of these two products brought tragedy and calamity.

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch explains that a person expresses his true personality via his clothing. So to speak "You are what you wear." Since the world was created in such a way that there are distinct species of plants, animals, materials, etc., and the Creator wants people to maintain this special orderliness, the Torah prohibited wearing a mixture of the most common fabrics.

There is a story about the "Steipler Rav," a renowned Torah scholar and *Tzaddik*, who had the custom of learning for long hours at one stretch before sleeping. The Chazon Ish was searching for a husband for his sister, and heard the most wonderful things about the young Steipler Rav. A *Shidduch* was set up. The Steipler planned to learn for a long stretch and then catch up on his sleep during the train ride from his city to the city of the Chazon Ish. On the first "date" the young couple were introduced, and the Steipler proceeded to fall asleep straight away. The young woman went to her brother, the Chazon Ish, and said, "What kind of a *Shidduch* did you arrange!" The Chazon Ish checked into the matter and discovered that the Steipler had not slept for some 36 hours straight! When the Steipler had boarded the train, he had a slight doubt that maybe the fabric of the seat cushion was *Shatnez*, and refused to sit down. So of course, he stood, remained awake, and continued to learn. When the sister of the Chazon Ish heard this explanation, she agreed to go out with the young man again and they eventually married...

Sources:

- Deut. 22:11.
- Rabbi Aharon HaLevi - *Sefer HaChinnuch* 551.
- Maimonides - *Moreh HaNevuchim* ch. 36.
- Zohar - Vayikra.
- Rabbi S. R. Hirsch - Deut. 22:11.

This Week's Riddle!

Eric Horowitz @sed.csc.com sent in the following riddle:

The Torah in *Parshat Terumah* speaks of the components and vessels of the *Mishkan*/Tabernacle. **Three** of the items are spelled with the same letters, just in different orders. What are these items?

Answer next week...

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to ohr@jer1.co.il. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

Ask The Rabbi is written by **Rabbi Yehoshua Karsh**, **Rabbi Benzion Bamberger**, and various other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

Production Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**

Production Design: **Lev Seltzer**

Ask The Rabbi is available from several sources:

- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub ask {your full name}" to listproc@jer1.co.il
- Fax within Israel: For information or to subscribe, send a fax with your name & fax number to 972-2-812-890.
- Current and Back Issues are archived on CompuServe's Religion Forum & the Jerusalem1 Gopher.

©1995 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved

Issue #55 -February 11, 1995

Dedication opportunities are available for Ask The Rabbi — Please contact us for details. This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.