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 לעילוי נשמת ר' יצחק מאיר בן אליהו ובריינא בת אברהם ע"ה ור' גדליה בן אברהם מנחם הכהן ומרים בת ישראל ע"ה

What Materials Can Be Used for Tzitzis Garments and Strings

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Is a cotton garment obligated in tzitzis?

Can one use nylon or polyester for tzitzis?

There is a mitzvah that a four-cornered garment worn by a male must have *tzitzis* attached to its corners. Women are exempt, as the mitzvah is time-bound. Technically, only one actually wearing a four-cornered garment must attach *tzitzis* to its corners, and one not wearing such a garment has no obligation to don such a garment. Nonetheless, the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 24:1) states that it is proper to wear a four-cornered garment with *tzitzis*. The Torah tells us (Bamidbar 15:39) "You shall see them, and remember all of the mitzvos of Hashem," and wearing *tzitzis* all day, says the Shulchan Aruch, serves as a reminder of the mitzvos at all times.

In addition, the Gemara (Menachos 41a) relates that an angel told Rav Ketina that although one may technically be exempt from the mitzvah if not wearing a four-cornered garment, a person can be held accountable during a time of Divine wrath for failing to take advantage of the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah (see Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 2:1).

Also, Chazal (Menachos 43b) teach that the mitzvah of *tzitzis* is equivalent to all 613 commandments, and one who enthusiastically fulfills it will merit to greet the *Shechina* (Presence of Hashem).

It is thus clear that males should wear a four-cornered garment with *tzitzis*, and, indeed, it is the common custom for Jewish males to begin wearing such a garment with *tzitzis* from a young age. While the large *talis* worn during prayers is known as a *talis gadol* (a large *talis*), the smaller garment worn to fulfill the mitzvah at all times is known as a *talis katan* (small *talis*).

Not every material, however, is obligated in *tzitzis*; some materials are completely exempt from *tzitzis*, and some are only subject to the mitzvah *mid'Rabanan* (Rabbinically). Attaching *tzitzis* to a garment that is actually exempt from *tzitzis* is not as innocuous as one would initially believe. Apart from missing out on actually fulfilling the mitzvah in accordance with the aforementioned custom, there are two serious transgressions one may encounter: 1) Making a blessing on donning the garment would be a *bracha levatala*, a blessing made in vain. 2) One who wears such a garment with *tzitzis* on Shabbos may transgress the *melacha* (forbidden labor) of *hotza'a* (carrying an object from one domain to another or in a public domain). This is because kosher *tzitzis* are considered a functional part of the garment and are not subject to the *hotza'a* restriction only because one is fulfilling the mitzvah with them. If they do not fulfill the mitzvah, they have no function as part of the garment, and one is considered to be carrying on Shabbos. This article will examine which materials are obligated in the mitzvah of *tzitzis*.

The source: The Gemara (Menachos 39b) cites a dispute regarding

the obligation of a silk garment in *tzitzis*. Rav Nachman says the obligation is only *diRabanan*, as only garments made of wool or linen are obligated in *tzitzis midiOrayso*. Rava, however, says that such a garment is obligated in *tzitzis* on a *diOrayso* (Scriptural) level. It is clear from the Gemara that the dispute is not limited to silk garments, but to a garment made of any material besides wool and linen.

The Gemara also teaches that may not use *tzitzis* strings made of any material besides wool and linen, unless the garment itself is made of the same material. Thus, one may use wool or linen for any material, but one may only use, for example, cotton *tzitzis* on a cotton garment and silk *tzitzis* on a silk garment.

The Bais Yosef (Orach Chaim 9:2) says that although the Gemara (ibid.) says that wool or linen *tzitzis* may be used in any garment, including wool *tzitzis* for a linen garment or linen *tzitzis* for a wool garment, this is only true when *techeiles*, which must be wool, was available¹. Since some for the *tzitzis* strings must be *techeiles*, it was permitted to wear *shatnez* to fulfill the mitzvah². However, now that we do not have *techeiles*, one may not have wool *tzitzis* on a linen garment or vice-versa, as it is *shatnez* and one can fulfill the mitzvah without it. This is codified in Shulchan Aruch (ibid.).

The halacha regarding garments: Tosafos (ibid. s.v. *viRav Nachman*) state that Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam both rule in accordance with Rava, since he is a later authority than Rav Nachman³. The Rosh (Menachos Halachos Ketanos-Tzitzis 18) also rules like Rava. The Rif (Menachos 14a *bedapei haRif*) and the Rambam (Hilchos Tzitzis 3:2), however, rule in accordance with Rav Nachman. The Kesef Mishna (ad. loc.) understands that the Ra'avad, in his glosses to the Rambam, rules in accordance with Rava.

The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 9:1) rules in accordance with Rav Nachman that other materials are only Rabbinically obligated. However, the Rema rules in accordance with Rava that all materials are obligated in *tzitzis miDiorayso*.

Ashkenazim normally follow the opinion of the Rema, and so it would seem, at first glance, that an Ashkenazic Jew fulfills the mitzvah of *tzitzis* equally with a garment made of any material. However, the Mishna Berura (ad. loc. 5) says that a *yarei Shamayim* (on who fears

¹ Although today there are many who use *tzitzis* strings dyed with what they believe is *techeiles* dye, because it is not clear that this is the case, is not allowed to wear *shatnez* based on such an assumption.

² A basic question: *Techeiles* is wool, and so one would have no choice but to use wool *tzitzis* on a linen garment, but why is it permissible to use linen *tzitzis* (for the non-*techeiles* strings) on a woolen garment? See Menachos 39b for a discussion of this issue.

³ This is because a later authority incorporates the earlier opinion into his thinking process; the fact that he still chooses to argue with it gives his position greater weight.

Heaven) should be stringent to follow the first opinion and use a woolen garment so as to be obligated in *tzitzis* on a Scriptural level according to all opinions; he adds that it is proper to do so for both the *talis gadol* and the *talis katan*. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 1:1) states that it is preferable to use a woolen garment, even in the summer. In a later responsum (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 2:1), he says that for those who follow the Rema's opinion, one who finds it difficult to wear a thick woolen garment when it's hot may wear a thinner cotton garment, but concludes that a *ba'al nefesh* (lit., possessor of a soul; refers to someone who is very careful with mitzvah fulfillment) should be stringent to use a woolen garment. These two responsa are not a contradiction per se, even though their language differs somewhat; it appears that Rabbi Feinstein holds that it is certainly better to use a woolen garment, but it is not an absolute necessity.

Linen: The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:6) cites an opinion (Rabbeinu Tam, cited in Tosafos [Menachos 40a s.v. *sadin*]) that one should not use a linen garment for a *talis*, and says that a *yarei Shamayim* should follow this stringency. The Magen Avraham (ad. loc. 7) explains that this is due to a concern from the times when *techeiles* was available, and one could thus permissibly wear *shatnez* (the linen garment and wool *techeiles*). This is permissible so long as one is fulfilling the mitzvah of *tzitzis*. However, there is no *tzitzis* obligation at night, and one might inadvertently wear the garment at night, when there is no mitzvah, and thus transgress the prohibition of wearing *shatnez*. Although we don't have *techeiles* today, concludes the Magen Avraham, the enactment against a linen garment remains in place.

The Rema (ad. loc.) rules that if one has no option but a linen garment with linen *tzitzis*, it is preferable to use that than to have no *tzitzis* at all. The Mishna Berura (ad. loc. 17) explains that this leniency is because there are other opinions that understand the decree as restricting only placing *techeiles* on a linen garment due to this concern, but a linen garment with linen *tzitzis* is permissible. Still others say that since there is no concern at all today due to the lack of *techeiles*, the decree does not apply. Thus, if one has no other option, he may be lenient.

Leather: The Gemara (Menachos 40b) cites Rava as saying that a garment made of [regular, woven] fabric with leather corners is obligated in *tzitzis*, but if the garment is leather with fabric corners, it is exempt, because the status of the garment is determined by the main body of the garment, not the corners. This is codified in the Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 10:4). From this passage it is clear that a leather garment is completely exempt from *tzitzis*.

The Levush (10:4) and Graz (Orach Chaim 10:7) say the reason is because an item that is not made from woven threads is not called a *begeg* (garment) according to halacha. The Aruch Hashulchan (10:9) says that throughout the Torah, leather is not included in the term "*begeg*," but is listed separately.

The Mishna Berura (ibid.:10) rules that so long as most of the garment is woven fabric, it is obligated in *tzitzis*.

Artificial fabrics: There are different opinions regarding the status of artificial fabrics. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim

2:1) rules that a garment made from nylon, rayon or other similar material is not obligated in *tzitzis* at all. He explains that the Torah only obligates garments normally made from woven threads, to the exclusion of leather. Rabbi Feinstein proves that even if one were to produce threads made of leather and weave a garment, there would be no *tzitzis* obligation, because the exemption is based on the fact that a garment can be produced without weaving threads, and so the fact that one did, indeed, manage to weave a leather garment from leather threads is immaterial. By the same token, continues Rabbi Feinstein, weaving a garment from artificially produced materials such as nylon or rayon does not remove the reality that one could create a garment without producing threads, and they are not included in the obligation of *tzitzis*.

However, Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank (Har Tzvi Orach Chaim 9) rules that so long as the garment is made from threads woven into a garment, it is obligated in *tzitzis*. Thus, a nylon garment made from woven nylon threads would be obligated (either Rabbinnically or Scripturally, per the dispute discussed earlier regarding materials other than wool or linen).

Materials that may be used for the *tzitzis* strings: As noted earlier, the Gemara states that wool and linen may be used for *tzitzis* for any garment (with the exception of wool for linen or linen for wool, due to *shatnez*), while other materials may be used only for a garment made of the same material. This is codified in Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 9:2-3).

The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.:4) says that if one used some strings made of wool and linen, and some made from the same material as the garment, there is an uncertainty as to whether this is valid. The Taz (ibid. 6) explains that there are two different verses cited by the Gemara, one which validates wool and linen, and one which validates other materials. It is unclear whether the two verses validate both options in tandem, or if one must choose one or the other.

The Rema (ibid.:2) cites an opinion that the *tzitzis* strings should never be made from linen. The Magen Avraham (ad. loc. 2) explains that silk and wool sometimes look similar, and one may inadvertently place linen *tzitzis* strings on a woolen garment thinking it is silk, creating a *shatnez* issue. Based on this, the Mishna Berura (ad. loc. 8) says that linen is only a problem on a silk garment, but not on other non-woolen materials. However, the Mishna Berura points out that there are other reasons given by the commentators that would include all materials in this restriction. The Mishna Berura notes that the Elya Rabba says that one may be lenient in case of difficulty.

In concluding, the ideal material for *tzitzis* is a woolen garment with woolen strings. Linen garments or strings should, if possible, be avoided, while other natural materials such as cotton (a popular choice in today's day and age) are acceptable. Artificial materials such as nylon are subject to dispute and so, while such *tzitzis* garments are available for purchase, it is advisable to consult with a qualified halachic authority before using such *tzitzis*. This is especially true in light of the importance of fulfilling the mitzvah of *tzitzis* in the best way possible, as discussed in the introduction, as well as the attendant concerns of *bracha levatala* and possible Shabbos desecration.

Points to Ponder

What is the status of a garment woven from multiple materials, such as a poly-cotton blend?

What is the status of a garment made of one material but lined with another?

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Please consult with a qualified halachic authority for all practical questions of halacha*

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