Preface Which Garments Need Tzitzit

Day 62

Textile for the Garment

The Torah states (*Bemidbar* 15:38), ''וְעָשׂוּ לָהֶם צִיצִת עַל כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם - they must make *tzitzit* for themselves on the corners of their garments.'' The Talmud (*Menahot* 39b) teaches that the *Tanna'im* debated which textiles obligate the owner of the garment to attach tzitzit. According to Ribbi Yishma'el, the mitzvah of the Torah applies only to garments made of sheep's wool or linen. Any garment made of some other textile must also have tzitzit attached, but only because of an institution of our Sages. This is because the Torah, when teaching about garments that become infected with *tzara'at*, specifies that it applies only to woolen or linen garments. He deduced from this that the word *beged*, wherever it might appear in the Torah, refers only to garments made of sheep's wool or linen.

Rava, however, explaining the majority opinion of the *Tanna'im*, ruled that all garments are obligated in tzitzit by the Torah, regardless of the textile with which they are made. He interpreted the words of the verse, ''עַל צִיצִת הַכָּנָף - the tzitzit on each corner,'' to mean that it does not matter what textile it is, as long as it is a four-cornered garment. Although the Torah implies the terms wool and linen in regard to the mitzvah of tzitzit (*Devarim* 22:11, 12), this means that woolen tzitzit tassels or linen tzitzit tassels can be used on any garment regardless of the textile with which it is made. Tzitzit tassels made of any other textile can be used only on a garment made of the same textile. Although wool and linen have special significance regarding the mitzvah of tzitzit, garments made of any material are all obligated by the Torah in the mitzvah of tzitzit.

Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi and Rambam ruled according to the first opinion, that the Torah obligates us in this mitzvah only if the garment is made of sheep's wool or linen. According to this, if someone wears a four-cornered garment made of another material such as cotton or silk, he does not fulfill the Torah mitzvah of tzitzit. This is likewise the opinion of Rabbenu Yosef ibn M'gash, *Sefer Ha'eshkol*, Rabbenu Yitzhak ibn Ghi'at, the Rashba citing Rav Hai Ga'on and the Ramban, Rabbenu Yosef di Trani, *Sefer Hahinukh*, the

Orhot Hayim, the *Kol Bo*, the *Nimuke Yosef* and Rabbenu Shelomo ben Shim'on, and this is the ruling of Maran (9:1).

The Rama, however, followed the opinion of the Tosafot and Rabbenu Asher that the Torah obligates one to place tzitzit on garments of all textiles. This is likewise the ruling of the Rashba (in his responsa), *Sefer Hamakhri'a*, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, *Mordekhi*, and *Arba'a Turim*.

In practice it is certainly better to make sure to wear a tallit made of wool so that one definitely fulfills the Torah mitzvah of tzitzit. This is even more important for Sefardic Jews – if a Sefardic Jew wishes to fulfill the Torah mitzvah of tzitzit, he can do so only by wearing a woolen tallit. The *Mishna Berura* (9:5), in fact, stated that anyone, whether Sefardic or Ashkenazic, who possesses a measure of the fear of Heaven will make sure to wear a woolen tallit.

Textile for the Tzitzit

If the garment is made of wool or linen, it is possible to place on it tzitzit tassels made of wool or linen. If the garment is made of other textiles, it is possible to use tzitzit tassels made of wool, linen or the particular textile of that garment. In other words, tzitzit tassels made of wool or linen can be used for a garment of any material, but tassels made of any other textile can be used only for a garment made of the same textile.

If someone attaches woolen tassels to a linen garment, or linen tassels to a woolen garment, the result is a mixture that the Torah ordinarily prohibits as *sha'atnez*. Nevertheless, it is permitted in this case since tzitzit is a *mitzvat ase* while *sha'atnez* is a *mitzvat lo ta'ase*, and the rule is that whenever one clashes with the other the *mitzvat ase* overrides the *mitzvat lo ta'ase*. The Talmud calls this principle *ase dohe lo ta'ase*.

There is a limitation to this, however. The mitzvah of tzitzit can override the prohibition of *sha'atnez* only when a person fulfills the full-fledged mitzvah of tzitzit, which includes the mitzvah of *tekhelet*. Each tassel is supposed to be composed of two white strands and two strands dyed with *tekhelet*. The white strands could be either wool or linen, but the *tekhelet* strands can be wool only.

As long as someone has both white and *tekhelet* strands in his tzitzit tassels, he does not need to be concerned with the issue of *sha'atnez* caused by the tassels. Nowadays, when we are not sure what *tekhelet* is or how to produce it, we have no authority to override the prohibition of *sha'atnez* in our tzitzit. Therefore, if someone has a woolen garment, he may attach only woolen tzitzit tassels to it, and if he wishes to wear a linen garment he must attach linen tassels to it.

A Linen Four-Cornered Garment

Rabbenu Tam ruled that it is forbidden to wear a linen tallit, since we do not have the right to override the prohibition of *sha'atnez* except during the day, when there is a mitzvah of tzitzit. At night there is no mitzvah, and the prohibition of *sha'atnez* remains in full force. The *Shulhan Arukh* (9:6) commented that if someone possesses the fear of Heaven he will take Rabbenu Tam's opinion into account and avoid wearing a tallit made of linen. Thus, in practice our only choice in fulfilling the Torah mitzvah of tzitzit is to wear a woolen tallit with woolen tzitzit tassels.