

Shaatznez – The Torah Prohibition of Mixing Wool and Linen

כלאי בגדים

Torah Source

The Torah commands:

"לא תלבש שעטנז צמר ופשתים יחדו"

"You shall not wear Shaatznez: wool and linen together."

(Devarim / Deuteronomy 22:11)

This is a **Negative Commandment**: It is forbidden to wear any garment made from a combination of **wool (צמר)** and **linen (פשתים)**.

What Is Shaatznez?

The word **Shaatznez (שעטנז)** is understood by the Sages to be an acronym for three processes:

- **Shua (שוע)** – combed
- **Tavi (טוי)** – spun into thread
- **Nuz (נוז)** – woven or twisted together

According to certain **Rishonim (early halachic authorities)** such as the **Rambam** and **Raavad**, the Torah prohibition of Shaatznez applies only when **both wool and linen** undergo **all**

three of these actions together. According to this view, **most modern clothing** would not constitute biblical-level Shaatnez.

Other Rishonim disagree and hold that even **a single process** may be sufficient to activate the prohibition.

Since this **machloket** (מחלוקת) – disagreement – has **never been conclusively ruled on**, the halachic status remains a **Safek De'oraita** (ספק דאורייתא) – a doubt in Torah law.

Shaatnez Today – A Halachic Safek Sefeka

When buying clothing today, **two levels of doubt** often exist:

1. **First Safek** – Is there even any wool and linen in the garment at all?
2. **Second Safek** – Even if both are present, do we follow the Rishonim who say the Torah prohibition only applies when all three actions (Shua, Tavi, Nuz) were performed with both materials together?

Since garments today almost never undergo all three processes together with wool and linen, the second doubt is really a **halachic uncertainty** about which opinion we follow.

These two doubts combine into a **Safek Sefeka** (ספק ספיקא) – a "double doubt" – which halachically allows one to be lenient, even in Torah matters.

Although one could theoretically test a garment with a "Shaatz checker," this involves **chemical analysis or dismantling** and is **not considered “Efshar Levarer Bekal” (אפשר לברור בקל)** – “easily clarified” – from a halachic standpoint.

Conclusion:

Unless the label clearly states **“wool and linen”** or there is a strong reason to suspect Shaatz, **you may wear the garment without checking**. There is no obligation to investigate further.

Spiritual Meaning of Shaatz – Kabbalistic Insights

Zohar (זוהר)

The **Zohar** (Kabbalistic cornerstone text) provides a profound insight:

The word **Shaatz** is interpreted as a combination of "**Satan Az**" (שטן עז) – *“the Satan is strong.”*

Wearing a mixture of wool and linen, according to this view, **strengthens negative spiritual forces** and gives power to impurity.

Cain and Abel – Symbolic Separation

Kabbalistic teachings also relate Shaatz to the story of **Cain and Hevel (Abel)**:

- **Cain** brought an offering of **flax** (linen).
- **Hevel** brought **sheep** (wool).
- Hashem favored Hevel's offering, igniting Cain's jealousy and leading to the first murder.

This teaches that **wool and linen symbolize incompatible spiritual energies**. Their forced combination represents a spiritual dissonance. The Torah warns against combining these energies, which originate from different sources and missions.

Rabbeinu Bachya (רבנו בחיי)

In his commentary, **Rabbeinu Bachya** explains that mixing wool and linen **disturbs the spiritual order**.

Each material corresponds to a distinct force in the **supernal realms**. Mixing them causes **disharmony in the upper worlds** – even if we don't perceive it in the physical world.

Why the Torah Cares – Sefer HaChinuch & Rambam

The **Sefer HaChinuch** (Mitzvah 551) expands on this, quoting the **Rambam (Maimonides)** in *Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed)*. According to the Rambam:

- Shaatnez garments were worn by **idolatrous priests** during pagan rituals.
- The Torah commanded us to avoid these combinations to **distance us from avodah zarah (idol worship)** and its influences.

The Chinuch adds a **mussar (ethical)** dimension: even when a mitzvah seems arbitrary or material, it trains us in **spiritual sensitivity** and **discipline**. The avoidance of Shaatnez reminds us that even physical acts have **spiritual consequences**.

Summary – Practical Halachah

- The Torah forbids wearing garments made from a combination of wool and linen.
- A dispute among Rishonim leaves the halachic definition of Shaatnez unresolved.
- Most garments today involve two halachic doubts:
 - (1) whether wool and linen are present;
 - (2) whether we follow the opinion requiring all three processes (Shua, Tavi, Nuz).
- These combine into a **Safek Sefeka**, allowing leniency even in Torah law.
- Testing is not considered **Efshar Levarer Bekal**, so no obligation to check.
- **Unless a garment clearly states both wool and linen**, or there is strong reason to suspect it, **you may wear it with no concern**.
- Kabbalistic teachings warn that Shaatnez causes spiritual imbalance and empowers negative forces, but the halachah remains grounded in the legal uncertainties above.