

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 34

Tetze, Sicha 1

The Dispute:

The Torah forbids a person to wear a garment woven of wool and linen together, referred to by the verse with the unusual word, shatnez. (Devarim 22:11)

The authorities disagree on the extent of this prohibition. What degree of mixing between the fabrics is forbidden? Rashi maintains that only fabrics mixed together at every stage of the garment's construction are forbidden. Rashi clarifies this in his comments to the Gemara which interprets the word shatnez as an acronym alluding to the degree of intermixing that must be met for a garment to become forbidden: "שֵׁטָה, combed, טָווּ, spun, and נָוָה, woven." Thus, the Torah prohibition of שֵׁטָה טָווּ נָוָה applies only to wool and linen which are combed, spun, and woven together.

Rabbeinu Tam disagrees and lowers the bar for the transgression. Even when each fabric is prepared separately, (combed, spun, and

woven into individual threads), and then afterwards the two fabrics are sewn or woven together in one garment, that is forbidden as shatnez.

The Justifications:

This dispute can seemingly be explained as originating in two different conceptions of what form of "forbidden mixture of fabrics" is being prohibited by Torah. Prior to this prohibition, the Torah forbade the mixing of seeds (verse 9) and the yoking of two animals together to work the fields (verse 10). The mixing of seeds creates a new species, it combines the two seeds at their essential level to form something new. The yoking of two animals together is a superficial combination; it does not create a new entity, it only uses both species to effect something external, plowing the field.

Which form of mixing is forbidden for fabrics? Is it to be seen as a derivative of seeds or of yoking animals? Rabbeinu Tam notices that the prohibition of mixed garments directly follows the prohibition of yoking animals. Therefore, he concludes that it is the superficial mixture which is

forbidden. Even if the threads are prepared separately, and they are distinct from each other within the garments, they are forbidden if they are woven into a single garment, just like the two species of animals are forbidden to work together.

Rashi, however, understands the prohibition of yoked animals as a precaution against the prohibition of mating animals together. Mating animals together is, like the mixing of seeds, a total integration which creates a new entity. Thus, even the yoking of animals is seen as a stage in the mating of animals. Rashi thus concludes that the mixing of fabrics is to be seen as another variation of creating a new entity, and thus is only forbidden when the fabrics are "combed, spun, and woven together."

Rambam's Middle Ground:

Rambam's position seems to occupy a middle ground between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam. In his laws of Kilayim he writes:

"If wool and linen are connected in any manner, they are considered mixed fabrics according to Scriptural Law. What is implied? When wool and linen were mixed together, combed together, and made into a smooth mass, they are considered as mixed fabrics. If they were mixed and combed as one and then a garment was woven from this combed fabric, they are considered mixed fabrics." (Kilaim 10:2)

That is, Rambam agrees with Rashi that there must be a substantive mixing of the

fabrics to be forbidden. But he agrees with Rabbeinu Tam that this mixing does not have to be at every stage of combing, spinning, and weaving, but even if they are "connected in any manner" it is forbidden.

This can be explained based on Rambam's understanding of the prohibition of plowing with two species of animals. In Moreh Nevuchim Rambam says that this prohibition is due to the fact that there is a connection being formed between the two animals yoked together. In other words, the prohibition of plowing together is similar in kind, but not degree, to the prohibition against mating animals together. The prohibition of mating is not just in the effect of a new species being created, it is the bonding of the two different species (which is expressed fully in the creation of a new species). Yoking the animals is a lesser form of connection between the species.

Rambam's definition of shatnez, then, can be seen as emerging from this conception as well. The prohibited action is one that combines and brings two fibers into close contact with one another, but it does not need to be essentially one, a newly created entity. Thus, "if wool and linen are connected in any manner, they are considered mixed fabrics," but they do not need to be integrated to the degree Rashi requires.

The Deeper Dimension:

Shatnez is distinct from other forms of forbidden mixtures in its prohibited action:

It is permissible to create a shatnez garment, it is merely forbidden to wear it. It is, however, prohibited to plant mixed seeds or plow with different species of animals.

Generally, the prohibition of mixed species is due to the altering of the species' fundamental nature by creating a new species. Yet wool and linen cannot truly become essentially mingled to create something new, since they are two different forms of life — wool is an animal product, and linen is a plant product. Thus, there can be no true essential mixing because they do share the basic characteristics of their composition.

In spiritual terms, wool (animal) alludes to the intellect (which is alive, grows, and can migrate from one mindset to another) while

linen (plant) alludes to the emotions (which grows and matures but remains rooted in one space). Therefore, it is permitted to mix intellect and emotion together in creating a product. The intellect should influence the emotions and vice versa. But we cannot “wear” the garment of wool and linen. A garment, which encompasses a person's body entirely, alludes to the transcendent powers of will and desire which encompass a person and directs them in single-minded focus to a chosen goal. When we are in the mode of “garment” and directed by a singular desire toward G-d, we cannot employ a mixed garment of emotion and intellect. We should have an unadulterated, focused garment of either one.
