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*Dedicated le'iluy nishmas*

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*Yahrtzeit 22 Sivan*

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## The Layered Garment

*A man wears wool pants over linen pants. Two separate garments, worn together. Is that sha'atnez?*

A question was presented to the Maharsham: may one wear wool pants over linen pants? And may one wear a wool undershirt over a linen shirt? The Shulchan Aruch permits wearing one shirt over another when the garments are not sewn together. But the Or Zarua and Hagahos Ashri are stringent regarding certain leg coverings, because the lower garment cannot be removed without first removing the upper one. **Is simple layering enough to create sha'atnez, or only a true halachic connection?**

### THE QUESTION

A person puts on a pair of linen pants. Over them, he pulls on a second pair made of wool. Two separate garments, each perfectly kosher on its own. But now they are layered, one directly on top of the other. Is this sha'atnez?

The same question arises with upper-body garments. A man wears a linen shirt and then pulls a wool undershirt over it. Two garments, two materials, no stitching between them. But wool is resting on linen.

The questioner had already done his homework. He cited the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 300:4), which rules that wearing one shirt over another is permitted, even if the two are tied together, so long as they are not sewn. The reasoning is clear:

sha'atnez applies when wool and linen are joined through weaving, sewing, or a lasting knot. Two shirts layered on top of each other are not joined in any of these ways.

But then the questioner raised the complication. The Or Zarua and the Hagahos Ashri rule that with *batei shokayim*, older-style leg coverings often fastened with straps or ties (see image on next page), the halachah is different. These were not ordinary modern pants. Because the coverings were tied in place, one could not remove the inner pair without first untying and removing the outer pair. The two garments were, in effect, bound together. If wool and linen are joined in that way, the concern of sha'atnez arises.

The questioner was also troubled by the Taz's explanation of the distinction between shirts and leg coverings, and turned to the Maharsham for clarity.

## THE MAHARSHAM'S ANALYSIS ✦

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### 1. Why Shirts Are Different from Leg Coverings

The Maharsham begins with a basic question: why does the Shulchan Aruch permit layering shirts while the Or Zarua prohibits layering certain leg coverings?

The answer lies in how the garments come off. With a shirt, even if a second shirt is worn over it, a person can slip his arms out of both sleeves, pull the inner shirt through the neck opening, and remove it while the outer shirt stays on. The inner garment can be extracted freely. This, the Maharsham notes, is the intent of the Shach (seif katan 10): the ability to remove the inner shirt without fully removing the outer one means the two are not halachically joined.

The older-style *batei shokayim* were different. These leg coverings were fastened at the top with straps and tied with knots. Once the outer pair was knotted in place, the only way to get the inner pair off was to first untie the knots and remove the outer pair entirely. The inner garment was bound in place by the outer garment's knots. That is why the Or Zarua treated them as joined.

### 2. The Principle: It All Depends on the Knot

Here the Maharsham states his core principle. The entire issue of kilayim depends on whether two garments are joined through sewing or knotting (תפירה או קשר). If the outer garment can be removed without untying any knot, there is no halachic connection between the two, and no prohibition exists.

The Maharsham is precise: it does not matter that the inner garment cannot come off without first removing the outer one. What matters is whether the outer garment itself requires undoing a knot in order to come off. If the outer pants can simply be pulled down and removed without untying anything, the two garments are not bound together. There is no *keshet*, no *tefirah*, and therefore no sha'atnez.



*Historical clothing often included separate lower-leg coverings worn with knee breeches and secured in place, illustrating why batei shokayim are not the same as modern pants.*

This distinction is critical. The older *batei shokayim* were forbidden precisely because they were fastened with tied straps. Ordinary pants, which are pulled on and off freely, do not fall under that concern.

### 3. Proof from the Yerushalmi

The Maharsham supports his ruling with a passage from the Yerushalmi (Kilayim 9:8). Even Rabbi Zeira, who took a strict position on sewing shoes with linen thread, agreed that a person who wraps himself with wool strips over a linen garment is permitted to do so, because the wool can simply be lowered and removed without untying anything. The P'nei Moshe explains: since the wrapping can slide off without undoing any knot, there is no halachic connection between the wool and the linen.

The Maharsham notes that the Or Zarua's own ruling about leg coverings is derived from this very Yerushalmi. And yet even within that Yerushalmi, the principle is clear: where no knot binds the garments together, there is no sha'atnez. The question is not whether one garment rests on the other. The question is whether the two have been joined.

### 4. Proof from the Laws of Shabbos

The Maharsham adds a second proof. The halachos of knots on Shabbos and the halachos of kilayim follow the same rules, as established by the Teshuvos Be'er Esek (Siman 55): whatever is not considered a lasting knot for Shabbos is likewise not a lasting knot for kilayim.

If wearing one garment over another created a genuine halachic knot between them, then putting them on or taking them off on Shabbos would be forbidden, just as tying or untying a lasting knot is forbidden on Shabbos (Orach Chaim 317). But the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 301:36) and the Rema explicitly permit wearing layered garments on Shabbos without any concern. Layering does not create a halachic connection.

## THE P'SAK

**The Maharsham rules that one may wear wool pants over linen pants when the garments are not sewn, woven, or tied together.** The same applies to a wool undershirt worn over a linen shirt.

Two garments do not become sha'atnez merely because they are worn together. The prohibition applies when wool and linen are joined into one garment, or into one halachic unit. Layering is not joining.

The Maharsham writes: הדבר ברור לעניי, "the matter is clear, in my humble opinion." The ruling rests on the Yerushalmi, the Shulchan Aruch, the Shach, and the parallel between kilayim and Shabbos. The stringency of the Or Zarua applies to older-style leg coverings fastened with straps or knots. It does not apply to ordinary layered garments that can be removed without untying such a knot.



In earlier generations, this was a practical question. Clothing was costly, wardrobes were limited, and a person might well own one pair of wool pants and one pair of linen pants. Whether he could wear them together on a cold day was not theoretical.

What makes this teshuvah remarkable is the Maharsham's method. He does not simply rule permitted or forbidden. He identifies the precise factor, the knot, that determines the outcome, and then tests it against multiple sources: the Shulchan Aruch, the Yerushalmi, the laws of Shabbos. Each source independently confirms the same principle. The Maharsham's ruling therefore gave more than an answer to one case; it gave a test for all similar cases. Is the outer garment fastened with a knot that prevents it from being freely removed?



KEY TERMS

- Sha'atnez** · (שעטנז) The Torah prohibition against wearing wool and linen when they are combined in a halachically significant way, such as through weaving, sewing, or a lasting knot.
- Batei shokayim** · (בתי שוקיים) Older-style leg coverings discussed by the poskim. Some were fastened with straps or ties, which is why layered pairs could be treated as joined.
- Keshel shel kayama** · (קשר של קיימא) A lasting knot. The Maharsham shows that the definition of such a knot is relevant both to hilchos Shabbos and to hilchos kilayim.

A TORAH THOUGHT

- The Maharsham distinguishes between garments that touch and garments that are joined. Where else in halachah do we find that appearance alone does not decide the issue?
- Why does halachah use the same definition of a lasting knot in both Shabbos and kilayim?
- What does tzitzis teach us about looking beyond the surface of the physical world?

*From the Maharsham's Techeiles Mordechai on Parashas Shelach\**

## תכלת מרדכי

*The Thread That Reminds*

At the end of Parashas Shelach, the Torah commands the mitzvah of tzitzis: 'וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את כל מצות ה', "And you shall see it and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem." The Gemara (Menachos 43b) asks: why does seeing the thread of techeiles lead to remembering all the mitzvos? Because techeiles resembles the sea, the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the Kisei HaKavod.

The Maharsham deepens the question. If the purpose of tzitzis is simply to serve as a reminder, why does the Torah require a specific garment and specific threads? A person could tie a string around his finger. The answer, he suggests, is that tzitzis is not merely a memory device. It is a statement about how a Yid relates to the physical world.

A garment covers the body. It belongs to the world of the material. Yet the Torah says: take this material object, attach threads to its corners, and through those threads, see all the way to the Kisei HaKavod. The garment itself becomes a means of remembering Hashem.

This is the deeper connection between tzitzis and the episode of the meraglim that precedes it in the parsha. The meraglim saw Eretz Yisrael and saw only the physical: fortified cities, giants, danger. They could not see past the surface to the Hand of Hashem guiding it all. Tzitzis is the Torah's response. A Yid sees the physical world, but he does not stop at the surface. Tzitzis teaches a person how to look.

COMING NEXT WEEK

*A thief steals money and then pays it back.  
Has he fulfilled his obligation of hashavas hagezeilah?*



WHO WAS THE MAHARSHAM?

Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaKohen Schwadron, ben HaRav Moshe (1835–1911), served as the Rav of Brezhan in Galicia for over 40 years. He is best known for his seven-volume Shut Maharsham, containing thousands of teshuvos on every area of halachah, and his Da'as Torah commentary on Shulchan Aruch. Regarded as one of the foremost poskim of his generation, his rulings are cited in halachic works to this day.

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

**Yerushalmi:** Kilayim 9:8. **Rishonim:** Or Zarua (Hilchos Kilayim, Siman 303); Hagahos Ashri. **Shulchan Aruch & Nosei Keilim:** Yoreh De'ah 300:4; Shach YD 300:10; Taz YD 300:3. **Acharonim:** P'nei Moshe on Yerushalmi Kilayim; Be'er Esek 55; Tur YD 300; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 301:36, 317.

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*Layering is not the same as joining.*

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