

# The Path To Follow

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## The Mitzvah Of Shmita: The Unity Of The Jewish People

It is written, "For six years you may sow your field, and for six years you may prune your vineyard...but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land" (Vayikra 25:3-4).

Appearing in these verses is Hashem's command to Moshe regarding the mitzvah of shmita, which consists primarily of not working the earth for an entire year every seven years. Furthermore, an additional instruction is given afterwards: "The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat – for you, for your male servant, for your female servant, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you" (v.6). Elsewhere we read, "The poor of your people shall eat" (Shemot 23:11).

Let us examine how the mitzvah of shmita is described in terms of the commandment to let fields lie fallow and not to harvest the fruits that grow there. In such a situation, the owner of the field will eat exactly in the same way as his male and female servants. Hence it follows that the nature of this mitzvah is the unity of the Jewish people, the fact that no one should feel superior to another. This is why a person is required to leave his field and vineyard open to everyone once every seven years, in order to recognize that despite their various differences, all Jews are one. They are all equal – rich and poor, master and servant, newcomer and member of an esteemed family – all of them are equal.

Sefer HaChinuch states something similar regarding the great principles of the mitzvah of shmita (Parsha Mishpatim, Mitzvah 84): This enables a person to acquire the attribute of renunciation, for a generous man does not give without the hope of receiving something in return, and renunciation – which primarily consists of the fact that a person does not feel superior to others – is the foundation of the mitzvah of shmita.

This mitzvah was given to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt, in order to remind them not to get caught up again in quarrels and disputes, which were the cause of their suffering in Egypt and which prolonged the exile. In fact Moshe, on the day after he killed an Egyptian who was striking a Jew, saw two Jews having a violent dispute. When he told the wicked one, "Why would you strike your fellow," he replied: "Do you propose to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Shemot 2:13-14). Here the Torah states, "Moshe feared and said, 'Surely the matter is known'" (ibid.), regarding which the Sages explain: "Moshe was thinking in his heart, 'How has Israel sinned in such a way that they are more enslaved than all other nations?' When he heard these words, he said: 'Lashon Harah is rife among them, so how can they be ready for deliverance?' Hence: 'Surely the matter is known' – now I know the cause of their enslavement" (Shemot Rabba 1:30).

Furthermore, the absence of unity and peace among the Children of Israel caused them to breach the 49 gates of impurity (Zohar Chadash, Yitro 39a), descending to such a level that they practiced idolatry. Thus as the Sages explain on the verse, "Draw out and take a lamb according to your families, and kill the Passover sacrifice" (Shemot 12:21): "Draw out your hands from idolatry, and take for yourselves the lamb of the mitzvah" (Mechilta, Bo II).

As we know, the Egyptians worshipped rams (the lamb), which was a god to them. The proof is that Moshe rejected Pharaoh's suggestion that the Children of Israel bring offerings in the land of Egypt, as we read: "Moshe said, 'It is not proper to do so... Behold, if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt before their eyes, would they not stone us?'" (Shemot 8:22).

As a result, since the Children of Israel were suffering in Egypt due to a lack of unity and an abundance of disputes, Hashem gave them the mitzvah of shmita following the exodus from Egypt. The essence of this mitzvah is the unity of the Jewish people, meaning that no Jew is more important or less important before Hashem. All Jews are equal before Him.

That is why this mitzvah was given precisely on Mount Sinai, and it is why the Torah recalls that it was given on Mount Sinai. It is because the Children of Israel already knew, while still

in Egypt, that they would leave that land for Mount Sinai and receive the Torah there, but only if they were perfectly united. Thus we read, "Israel encamped before the mountain" (Shemot 19:2) – "Like a single man with a single heart" (Mechilta, ad loc.).

We find another novel idea in the mitzvah of shmita: Although all the mitzvot were given on Mount Sinai during the giving of the Torah, it is only in regards to the mitzvah of shmita that the Torah expressly states: "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai" (Vayikra 25:1). [Rashi deals with this issue and gives his own interpretation.] We shall now explain why Mount Sinai has a greater connection to the mitzvah of shmita than to the other mitzvot.

Before the giving of the Torah on Sinai, and as a precondition for the giving of the Torah, Jews had to reach an elevated level in terms of perfecting themselves as a people and being united. In fact the Torah testifies that this precondition was fulfilled when the Children of Israel reached Mount Sinai, as it is written: "Israel encamped opposite the mountain" (Shemot 19:2). Here the Sages note that the term "encamped" is in the singular, meaning that Israel acted like a single man with a single heart (Mechilta, ad loc.). It was only after acting in this way that they could approach and receive the Torah.

Because the essence of the mitzvah of shmita is the unity of the Jewish people, as we have explained, and since everyone is equal before Hashem, the Torah chose to highlight Mount Sinai (for there too, unity was required to receive the Torah) in regards to the mitzvah of shmita. It therefore said "at Mount Sinai" in regards to the mitzvah of shmita, for Mount Sinai is where the Children of Israel achieved such complete unity that they could receive the Torah.

If we think deeply about this concept, we will realize just how important the mitzvah of shmita truly is. The Torah has given us a mitzvah that comprises the concept of Jewish unity, as it is written: "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18). Regarding this mitzvah, Rabbi Akiva said: "[It] is a great principle of the Torah" (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:3). In this regard we also find the story of how a non-Jew went to see Hillel to be converted, but only on condition that Hillel teach him the entire Torah as he stood on one foot. Hillel converted him and said, "What you hate, do not do to your fellow" (Shabbat 31a), which is the translation of the mitzvah, "You shall love your fellow as yourself."

Unity is thus a great Torah principle, and since we stated that the essence of the mitzvah of shmita is love for others and the unity of the Jewish people, it too is a great principle of the Torah. It is the entire Torah while standing on one foot, just like the mitzvah of loving your fellow as yourself.

There is more. All the mitzvot that deal with relations between man and man (such as giving charity, not stealing, etc.) are mitzvot that the nations of the world can understand. However these do not include the mitzvah of shmita, which also contains the realization that a person, in and of himself, possesses nothing, and that everything he has is a gift from the Creator. The mitzvah of shmita is thus extremely important, for it weighs as much as all the other mitzvot, dealing with relationships between man and man as well as between man and G-d. That is why Mount Sinai is mentioned in regards to this mitzvah.

By way of allusion, the term shmita has the same numerical value as "fifty" (gates of purity) and the Name Sha-dai. This tells us that Hashem says dai ("enough") to the troubles of a man who observes the mitzvah of shmita and is not afraid of having nothing to live on. Hashem protects all the doors of his home, and he will reach the level of the fiftieth gate of sanctity. In fact a person who practices charity gives life to the world, and he is also the partner of G-d. Who said dai ("enough") to Creation (Zohar III:251b). Such a person will be protected from the danger of breaching the fifty gates of impurity, and he will grow in sanctity. By the merit of observing the mitzvah of shmita and all the other mitzvot, we will also emerge from our present exile and hasten the Final Redemption, speedily and in our days. Amen!

### A Rare Opportunity to Not Take Interest

It is written, “Do not take interest or increase, but fear your G-d and let your brother live with you” (Vayikra 25:36).

One day a leader from the Jewish community in Pressburg, considered to be a great merchant and very wealthy man, came before Rabbi Moshe Sofer (known as the Chatam Sofer), the Rav of the city. The man appeared disheartened, contrary to his normal demeanor, and he murmured to the Rav that he had a secret to tell him.

The Rav brought him into a secluded room and locked the door shut. At that point the man suddenly burst into tears and described his great misery. One of his business ventures had failed, causing him to lose his entire fortune. His only remaining option was to take a beggar’s sack and start pleading for money.

The Chatam Sofer tried to console and encourage the man, but tears continued to flow from his eyes. Not only had he lost his entire fortune in a business venture gone bad, he also signed an IOU that was soon coming due, and he could see no end to the hopeless situation in which he found himself. Nobody knew the financial straits he was in, not even his wife. However as soon as the due date for his first bill arrived, but he failed to pay it, everyone would know. How would he be able to endure such shame?

If that weren’t enough, in a few days the great Leipzig trade fare would open, which he had attended every year since becoming an adult. He had never missed it even once. Yet now, if he did not attend, people would immediately realize that something was wrong. But if he were to attend, what could he do without a cent in his pocket, not to mention that he did not even have enough money to get there!

The Chatam Sofer asked him, “How much does it cost to travel to Leipzig?”

The man let out a sigh and said, “What it cost me in the past has nothing to do with the price. Now I could make the journey for 100 gold pieces, but even that I don’t have!”

“Only 100 gold pieces?” the Rav said in surprise. “I’ll lend you the money. Go to Leipzig and stop worrying. Hashem will help you.” As he was speaking, the Rav went to a chest and took out 100 gold pieces, which constituted his entire fortune, and handed them to the community leader.

At first he refused to take the money. He had come to see the Rav in order to confide in him and obtain his advice, certainly not to take his money. Furthermore, how would he be able to repay him? The Rav, however, did want to hear of it, and so he gave him the money and bid him farewell.

“Rabbi, I don’t know how I can thank you,” said the man as he wept.

“Thank me?” interjected the Rav. “Certainly not! I’m now a lender, and it is forbidden for me to take financial interest as well as interest in terms of words. Go in peace, and G-d will grant you success.”

In short, the leader of the community traveled to the fair in Leipzig. Once he arrived, a merchant friend immediately offered to sell him a large supply of coffee on credit, a deal that he accepted. On that very same day, the price of coffee shot up, and he quickly sold it and made a profit of thousands of rubles. Fortune smiled on him during the entire

time that he was there, meaning that he was able to resell everything he purchased for a large profit.

Before returning home, he thought of something: It was proper for him to get something nice for the Chatam Sofer. Since the Rav knew a great deal about diamonds, the man purchased a gold ring with an inset diamond as a gift.

Upon arriving in Pressburg, he immediately went to see the Rav.

“Rabbi!” he screamed with joy, “your blessing has been fulfilled! Here are the 100 gold pieces to repay my debt, and here’s a small gift to thank you for the tremendous favor you did for me.” He then carefully took out the ring from his bag and placed it before the Rav.

The Chatam Sofer took hold of the ring, looked at the diamond, and said with amazement: “What a beautiful ring, and what an extremely rare diamond! There’s definitely none like it in Pressburg!” He continued holding the ring in his hand.

The community leader was filled with joy! He had found a gift that was to the Rav’s liking!

The Chatam Sofer kept examining the ring with wonderment, looking at it from all angles, and not concealing his amazement. “It’s as clear as water, without the slightest impurity. A wonder of wonders!”

A moment later, he returned the ring to the man and said, “Again, I have to tell you that I’ve never seen such a beautiful diamond before. It’s a true jewel, and I wish you much happiness with it.”

“What do you mean?” asked the man. “Rabbi, I purchased the ring for you as a gift.”

“My dear friend,” replied the Chatam Sofer, “if I hadn’t given you a loan, I might have accepted this ring from you as a gift. However since I gave you a loan, I am forbidden to accept it, for it would constitute the ‘dust of interest.’”

Once the man left completely disappointed, one of the Chatam Sofer’s students, who was there at the time, had the courage to ask him: “Forgive me Rabbi, but if you had no intention of accepting the ring, then why did you hold it in your hand for so long and examine it with such amazement and joy?”

The Chatam Sofer replied, “My son, I was happy to have an opportunity to fulfill such a great mitzvah. When does a rabbi have the opportunity of fulfilling the mitzvah of not taking interest? When does a rabbi have the opportunity to lend money to someone? And who would pay interest to a rabbi?”

“Since the mitzvah was given to me in an unexpected way and I was able to fulfill it, I felt tremendous joy. That’s why I meditated upon this extraordinary mitzvah, in order to properly fulfill it.”

## Guard Your Tongue!

### Judging in Righteousness

One who knows that the information he has been told is true – yet the information can be interpreted in different ways, and that the speaker is simply viewing things negatively – it is a mitzvah for the listener to judge him favorably. One who violates this by not judging him favorably, but rather agrees with the one speaking derogatorily, has not only violated, “In righteousness shall you judge your fellow” [Vayikra 19:15], he has also accepted Lashon Hara, for by not judging the subject favorably, he has accepted the derogatory statements made about him.

– Chafetz Chaim

## Shatnez

It is written, "A garment mixed of linen and wool shall not come upon you" (Vayikra 19:19).

The garment industry has expanded over the course of the last decade, and today it produces huge quantities of goods that are sold around the globe. In Israel, garments and their accessories are imported from all over the world, from East to West, the United States to Europe, and with the fall of the Iron Curtain, from countries of the former Soviet Union.

In the process of fabricating garments, most manufacturers use linen fibers. The characteristics of linen contribute to proper-fitting garments, and linen has numerous uses in the garment industry, from strengthening buttons to various roles in production. The frequency of linen in textile manufacturing increased when technology began to move from synthetic to natural fibers, which greatly increased the percentage of shatnez in the sub-components of garments. The various characteristics of linen (solid, light, absorbing humidity and sweat, airy) makes it popular and drives its demand. Furthermore, the sense of touch, which in the past was used to detect the biological origins of fibers, can no longer follow the progress of technology. It's a fact: Skilled tailors, who have been in the business for many years, have failed in tests to properly identify fibers.

Information gathered in specialized laboratories that check for shatnez indicate its vast presence in the textile industry. Shatnez has been discovered in 90% of clothes from Eastern Europe, 80% of clothes from Australia and South Africa, and 50% from the United States. The percentages in Israel are at the bottom of the scale, with shatnez being found in 20% of clothes.

Yet even this low percentage is questionable. Most garments sold in fabric and clothing stores are imported from outside of Israel, where as we have said, shatnez has invaded the textile industry. The consumer who commonly purchases garments is not aware of these problems.

### Four Labels for a Single Garment

What, for example, does the following label say to you:

Wool 70%, Linen 15%, Polyamide 15%. Nothing? Don't fall off your chair. At Israel's Ministry of Industry and Commerce, they are not yet fully aware of the exact meaning of labels that are hidden away in the seams of garments, and which indicate the composition of a garment. Thus, for example, the English term "linen" is frequently translated as "nylon" in Hebrew.

In other words, in terms of what concerns us, wool + linen = shatnez

This is the simple combination to watch out for on labels that, as we have said, are placed along garment seams by manufacturers or importers. Label contents, however, are often incorrect, written erroneously. In fact by law, label descriptions may differ from actual contents by up to 5%, not to mention that the law obligating manufacturers to describe the contents on labels does not cover the sewing material, shoulder pads, collars, and so on. In fact if a label were to state that a garment contains 100% polyester, there is a large probability that it contains shatnez. This is due to the fact that wool and linen may be present in areas where the label description does not apply, such as the sewing material or the collar, the buttons and other items.

The kind of label required to give a detailed description of all the various kinds of fabrics used in a garment would be completely different than the labels used today. In fact it would take four labels to fully describe the contents of any given garment, something completely different than what we have today – as well as illusionary and unrealistic.

Here is just one example among many: Mrs. X purchased some evening apparel at a clothing boutique in the Geula neighborhood of Jerusalem, and written on the label was the description: 100% Polyester. Nothing to worry about, she told herself, and off she went to the bus stop. On the way, she glanced at the storefront of a shatnez lab, and a casual thought came to mind: "Why not get it checked? Even if it proves useless, at least it can't do any harm!"

From thought to action, she left her garment at the lab. Not long afterwards, the astonishing result arrived: 55% wool, 45% linen!

Dozens of similar examples exist, but let us describe the following, reverse case:

An orthodox girl from Bnei Brak purchased a sweater. When she arrived home, she asked her father what he thought of it. When he saw it, however, he immediately began screaming. What had happened? The label was crying out to him: Shatnez!

Upon the advice of a friend, the sweater was sent to a shatnez lab, and the result was no less surprising:

The sweater was complete beyond suspicion. It contained wool, cotton, and some synthetic fibers, but no linen whatsoever. As we already mentioned, it's impossible to trust what's on the label in any given case.

Here's another interesting story: A well-known clothing store that sold men's suits sent a substantial quantity of their suits (which had been sewn in-house) to be checked for shatnez. The owners of the store were absolutely certain that everything was alright, since they themselves had sewn the suits together and paid attention to even the smallest possibility of shatnez.

Of course they were disappointed by the lab results. The suits themselves contained no shatnez. However the pockets, which had arrived from an outside manufacturer, had been sewn with linen thread. The result was that all the pockets from their suits had to be removed and then re-sewn with cotton thread!

It's a sad reality. Numerous garments worn by people every day contain shatnez. The percentages may be higher or lower, but shatnez is present. There is also very little awareness about the issue of shatnez among the buying public. In general, people tend to believe the orthodox salesman or saleswoman, as well as the labels found in the seams of garments. They don't even consider the possibility that there can be a problem with such a garment that relates to a Torah prohibition, as well as the spiritual consequences that wearing such a garment entails.

We cannot close this chapter before citing the words of the author of Shalmei Tzibur: "There is nothing that prevents a person's prayers from being accepted more than wearing a garment that contains shatnez, even if he wears it inadvertently!"

Garment manufacturers have great difficulty obtaining a certificate of kashrut testifying to the absence of shatnez in their products. The reason is very simple: It is not cost-effective for any tailor or manufacturer to make all parts of a garment. He will purchase lining from one source, shoulder pads from a second, collars from a third, and so on. Thus trying to determine the origin of every single part constituting a garment is not an easy task. Only someone who is very passionate about it will be able to undertake such a massive task.

To give you an idea of the frequency of shatnez in everyday clothing, let us cite the fact that in a single pair of pants, shatnez can be found in about 15 different areas, as well as in 52 different areas of a coat!

Earlier, we described what happened to a well-known clothing store that gave an enormous number of men's suits to get checked. They had all been sewn in-house, and the owners of the store were certain that everything was alright because they had paid attention to everything that might lead to the presence of shatnez. Yet regrettably, the results proved disappointing. The suits themselves contained no shatnez, but the pockets they contained, which came from an outside source, had been sewn with linen thread.

We should be open to the possibility of improbable scenarios. The following story, which actually happened, truly makes us realize just to what point we must verify the accuracy of labels:

In one lab that checked for shatnez, an interesting article of clothing was brought in. A certain manufacturer of men's suits had placed a label on its products that stated: "No Threat of Shatnez." Verification in a lab showed that the label itself had been sewn to the woolen garment with a linen thread!

Hence it is easy to understand why we cannot trust a tailor who asserts his piety and declares that his merchandize is entirely shatnez-free. He simply does not know what he is talking about. The same goes for a woman who sews dresses and blouses, along with decorative ribbons and fashion accessories, for herself or her daughters. She must pay careful attention to all the components that go into these garments, or she must send them to get checked at a lab. It will cost her a little more, but it is worth it.

People who work at shatnez labs, who protect the public from transgressing this grave prohibition, are equipped with specialized, modern equipment. They also have a tremendous amount of experience in verifying the raw materials that go into making garments, identifying them and sorting them. The verification process lasts long enough, which sometimes pushes people not to use these labs. Because they lack an understanding of the gravity of wearing shatnez, they fall into a very serious prohibition.

Concerning the words of the verse, "You shall not wear combined fibers, wool and linen together" (Devarim 22:11), the Rambam notes: "The mixture has no minimum quantity. Even the smallest wool thread in a large linen garment, or the reverse, is forbidden."

We must point out that during the summertime, the workload greatly decreases at labs that check for shatnez, meaning that people wait less time for results. Lab workers advise people to bring in garments for checking during the summer, not to wait until winter.

Other than the regular verification of garments that takes place all throughout the year in specialized labs, lab workers also devote themselves to prevention activities whose goal is to help people avoid the risk of transgressing the prohibition of shatnez. With unstinting devotion, they attempt to get to the source of problems and fix what requires attention. In this way, they often manage to identify a problem before it manifests itself. By getting to the source, they prevent problems from spreading and affecting thousands of garments, thereby eliminating a tremendous amount of work.

In numerous cases, lab employees have acquired raw materials made of linen. Only in this way are they able to convince factory owners to use permitted materials from that point on.

When linen is found in a garment, an effort is made to communicate the problem to the owner of the factory where that garment was made, preventing the problem from recurring. At the same time, tailors and merchants who have ties to that factory are informed of the problem so they can pay even greater attention to it.

## Serving the Community

People usually think that shatnez is just found in ordinary clothes: Pants, jackets, coats, sweaters, and skirts. Thus who, for example, has ever thought of checking for shatnez in a tie? What about a robe? A tallit? A carpet? Not to mention boots and slippers!

Yes, the list is long, and we'll briefly mention the kinds of garments in which we find, and do not find, shatnez.

Tunics. Fabrics. Blazers. Curtains. Men's suits. Blouses. Tallit. Caps. Fur. Armchairs. Couches. Boots. Winter coats. Raincoats. Slippers. Ties. Shawls. Shatnez may be present in any of these items, and it is preferable to have them checked in a lab.

Earmuffs. Socks. Leather belts. Shirts made from cotton & polyester. Gloves. Kippas. Shoulder pads. Underwear. Towels. Hats. Pajamas. Fabric bags. Shatnez is not found in these items.

If we take couches as an example, wool fabric is used to upholster them, and upholsterers usually sew the fourth side of a couch with linen thread. According to information gathered by shatnez labs, most couches manufactured in Israel before 1980 contain shatnez. We must underline that a lab does not need to examine the entire couch. It is enough to bring in one cushion, for it will serve as a reliable source to determine the way in which the trim was made.

In general, no linen is found in a tallit made of wool or cotton. However it is common for the thread of the crown to be made of linen. As for boots, it often happens that the lining is made of wool and the padding or sewing thread made of linen. The same applies to ties, for the lining may be made of wool, but sewn with linen thread.

A high percentage of women's hats also contain shatnez. Women who cover their hair with a hat, especially from eastern Europe, should have their hats checked. Not long ago, a new immigrant had sewn hundreds of such hats, and after a good number of them had been sold, they were checked and found to contain shatnez.

Shatnez labs exist in Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Rehovot, Ashdod, Haifa, Ofakim, Rechasim, and Kiryat Sefer. There are also mobile labs that make frequent visits to cities throughout Israel, carrying out professional and reliable checks. These labs use modern equipment and ingenious methods to find shatnez, employing microscopic tests and chemical analyses performed by a competent team of professionals who do all they can to clear away obstacles. As such, they possess the merit of the community.

## Ways of Identifying Wool and Linen

To carry out a reliable test for shatnez in a laboratory, a person must be a long-time expert in the field. This is because there is no way to learn this profession halfway, a third, or even a quarter of the way. Incomplete training in this field will likely lead to numerous errors. It is also why we cannot describe the precise, actual methods used to help identify shatnez. However we will discuss several issues that will help us further recognize that checking for shatnez should only be done by experts.

To properly understand what occurs in a lab, and how the presence of shatnez in a garment can be determined, we must first talk a little about various kinds of fabric.

### Natural or Synthetic

In the textile industry, raw materials are divided into three main groups:

1. **Natural Raw Materials.** These are materials found in nature (cotton, linen, hemp, jute), which come from a leaf or even from the fruit itself. There is also natural wool that comes from animals, whose basic fibers have not undergone any physical or chemical changes. Such raw materials are obviously worked in order to make them suitable for threading and weaving, but the basic fibers remain in their natural state.

For example, there have been no major changes in the way that cotton fibers (which are obviously natural) have been worked since the distant past. The equipment and methodology used to work cotton fibers has improved, but the way of manufacturing them remains the same. The fibers are made into either thread or fabric, without any change in their natural state.

2. **Artificial Raw Materials.** These are based on natural raw materials that we find in nature, such as proteins and cellulose, but they undergo various processes in order to transform them into something which the textile industry can use. They constitute an imitation of natural raw materials.

3. **Synthetic Raw Materials.** These are materials that are created by means of chemical

processes, and are based on man-made products. The components used to make synthetic raw materials are themselves natural: Minerals, peat, gas, crude oil, etc.

## Color and Odor

A good part of the testing that takes place in the lab is carried out on very fine fibers. The elementary fiber (base material) is a lone, extremely thin strand that cannot be cut along its length or separated into a smaller, finer strand.

Numerous fabrics have been manufactured using various kinds of threads and fibers. To check for the presence of wool and linen in a garment, one must be very skilled, with an understanding of how to distinguish between various kinds of threads, so as not to overlook even a single linen thread.

An expert distinguishes between the different kinds of threads that comprise a fabric, differences that manifest themselves in color, brightness, thickness, how the fibers branch out, and a few other differences that we shall mention in greater detail further on.

A chemical analysis reveals the nature of a fiber, which depending on its makeup will react in a certain way when placed in a chemical bath. Specialists in this field are aided by detailed charts that describe the various kinds of fibers, chemical baths, and reactions that can occur.

Another simple procedure is a flammability test. It is a simple, quick, and easy test to carry out, though only useful when a thread is composed of similar fibers. When a thread is composed of various fibers, a clear result cannot be obtained.

This is how a flammability test works: A corner of the fabric in question is put to a flame, which progresses along its threads. At this point various distinctive signs can be observed, signs that indicate the true origin of the material: The way in which it burns, the speed of the flame, and whether or not the flame jumps as it progresses.

The odor of the burning fabric is also important: Does it give off the odor of burnt hair, burnt paper, or a bitter odor?

What remains also tells us something: Does the sample turn to ash when burned, or does it become a solid ball? Its shape and volume when burned are important too. We have already mentioned the branching of the fibers. A clear indication that helps researchers discover the origin of a fiber is its degree of branching and twist. Plant-based fibers (linen, hemp, jute) demonstrate a twist. When we wet the base fibers and then dry them, they demonstrate a clear tendency to twist in a direction that is described as S-Twist. This is the opposite of what other fibers do, which always twist in the opposite direction. In technical terms, it is described as Z-Twist.

As we have said, these signs are only partial indicators of a fiber's identity. Various materials have other characteristics that distinguish them from one another. It is only when the data is compiled from all tests as a whole, as well as from the experience accumulated by those performing the tests, that a true, complete, and reliable result can be obtained.

We should point out that testing for shatnez by unskilled individuals may sometimes result in needless financial loss. Just as a person performing such a test may permit something that is forbidden, his inexperience may also cause him to prohibit something that is permissible, thus wasting a Jew's money.

## Thorough Testing

Employees at labs that check for shatnez are constantly surprised each time they discover a mixture constituting shatnez in totally unexpected places. Such incidents have led them to a certain number of hypotheses that encompass all relevant points in regards to checking for shatnez, and which must be taken very seriously:

- Someone who purchases a suit for himself and wants to check it for shatnez must bring all parts of the suit (vest, pants, and lining) to the lab. One part of the suit being kosher does not prove that the entire suit is kosher.

- Even when purchasing two identical pairs of pants, for example, a person must bring both of them to be checked, even if it seems logical to assume that they were manufactured at the same time and that the results of one pair can therefore apply to the other. Such is not the case, for experience has shown that results are not the same for similar garments that have been manufactured at the same time. When checked at a lab, shatnez may be found in one garment, whereas the other garment may not contain the slightest trace of it.

- There is also a chance of finding shatnez in garments made from synthetic materials. How so? It is because shatnez sometimes exists in the shoulder pads of a garment, in wool collars sewn with linen thread, or in the lining and other places.

- Another important point: There are some people who go to a lab with samples of fabric from which a tailor is making a garment for them. From the standpoint of the lab, it is not enough to bring a sample, for there are dozens of places in coats and suits where linen may be found, and only an expert technician is capable of finding these remote spots. Hence a garment should only be brought to a shatnez lab once it is completely finished.