

Spotlight on...Shatnez

Background:

Parashat Ki Teitze contains many commandments. One of them is the prohibition against wearing a mix of wool and linen clothing, which is called shatnez. Devarim 22:11 says:

לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שֵׁשׁ שְׂעֵטָה וְצִמְרֵי וּפְשָׁתִים יַחְדָּו: You shall not wear cloth combining wool and linen.

This commandment is understood to be a classic example of a חוק, or a law that does not have any obvious explanation (as opposed to a משפט, a law that does appear to have a reasonable explanation.) However, our rabbis still provided possible interpretations of shatnez to explain why we have this prohibition.

The Chizkuni offers 2 explanations:

- A. Wool and linen are prohibited to be mixed together because they represent the tragedy of Kayin and Hevel. Hevel's sacrifice was sheep (wool), and Kayin's sacrifice was flax (plants from which linen is made).
- B. The Kohen's clothing is made of shatnez. Therefore, shatnez represents holiness that should not also be worn for other purposes, and should be reserved only for the service of Hashem.

Questions:

1. According to the first explanation, what does shatnez represent? What is the symbolism of not wearing it?
2. According to the second explanation, what does shatnez represent? What is the symbolism of not wearing it?
3. In your opinion, is there value to attempting to explain the meaning behind a חוק?