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Is your Shatnez being removed completely?

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R' Aharon Drebin for twenty years a tester of clothing for the Flatbush Shatnez Center, has written an amazing document showing how so many mistakenly trust non-Jewish tailors to remove Shatnez and to repair the garments without so much as asking a Shatnez tester to double check whether the work was done properly. Now, perhaps people will be more careful.

During the twenty years that I have had the opportunity to serve the public in checking for *Shatnez*, I have repeatedly seen many people fall into the same trap, one of which could easily be avoided. Now I am putting it down in writing and so at least the readers of *Kashrus Magazine* will be forewarned and hopefully will share this important information with their friends.

The most common location in a man's suit to have *Shatnez* is the collar. Removing the *Shatnez* completely is a very involved- tedious and challenging- part of the tester's work.

When a tester finds *Shatnez*, he will open all the seams which the linen canvas is attached to and remove it from the suit. He will then brush and scrape out all the remaining threads and fibers to be sure that nothing is left. At this point it is common practice in many *Shatnez* laboratories to give a second tester the garment to double check that it is now clean. Finally, the tester makes a hole in the old canvas and gives it to the customer together with a kosher textile to be duplicated and replaced in the garment.

Unfortunately, over the past many years, tailors, sometimes on the advice of the unaware customer, will remove the collar canvas themselves in an attempt to render the suit *Shatnez*-free on their own and replace it with a canvas that is hopefully not linen.

The fact is that many tailors will remove just enough stitching to allow them to remove the canvas and replace it with the least effort needed. We have discovered stray threads left in the corners and many a time we found that the tailor cut out the canvas while leaving the perimeter still sewn into the suit.

To illustrate:

1. Mel L., a well-known Brooklyn lawyer, sent his messenger to us with two Ermenegildo Zegna suits and one Brioni. These suit companies have a bad track record

in regard to *Shatnez*. The two Zegnas contained *Shatnez* in the collar and the Brioni had a *Shatnez* collar and waistband.

Mel asked if it would be okay for his Long Island tailor to remove the *Shatnez* since he will be altering the suits. I told him that I agreed on condition that, after the removal of the linen canvases BEFORE the replacement, the suits would be sent back to me for inspection to see that all the threads were removed.

A few days later, a messenger appeared with the suits, but they were almost completely repaired. Since the final stitches were not yet in, I was able to poke around the corner of the collars. My findings were that all the suits still had whole threads sewn into the collar that were not removed, and that the front of the waistband (where the clips are), a very difficult place to work, had not even been touched.

I called Mel, who got the tailor on the line. I challenged him. Why had he, against the customer's desire, repaired the suit before my inspection?

He said, and I'll give it my best try to imitate the Italian, "*I no atouch the front of de waistband. Ita difficult to fix. I doa dis for alla my Jewish customers. Why you mixa into my work?*"

P.S. Mel never let a tailor remove *Shatnez* again.

2. A number of years ago the market was flooded with Korean suits with the *kashrus* of the collar unclear. One store's *Shatnez* tester permitted them, considering the matter a *safek midrabonon*, a doubt in a Rabbinic matter.

A short while later, Mr. Yosef Rosenberger, *Zt"l*, the founder of *Shatnez* testing in America, and to whom we all owe an amazing debt of gratitude, clarified the matter, and decided that all such suits would, from then on, require removal of the canvas from the collar. One store's tailor responded by removing the lower part of the collar canvas from the suits and replacing them with cotton ones. The *Shatnez* tester, upon seeing the cotton canvas figured that the new batch of suits was *Shatnez*-free in the collar. So with a few quick checks on the other parts of the suits, they passed their *Shatnez* test and got their non-*Shatnez* label.

Upon re-inspection of the collars, I found that the top edge of the collars were not removed, and reported to the public just what the tailor had done.

3. Last summer, a storeowner who had been told by a *mekubal* that he is deceiving people in the matter of *Shatnez*, approached us for help. He reported that his tailor was removing *Shatnez* collars from Pal Zalari, Armani, and Vestimenta suits, and other brands as well, without any supervision. I told him that he surely will have *Shatnez* in those garments. He contacted his customers and rounded up about 50 suits which we tested, and re-cleaned the collars. We found remaining *Shatnez* in about 40 of the suits (that is 80%).

4. This past March we discovered that a well- known non- Jewish custom tailor shop was offering *Shatnez* removal and restoration on all high-end suits for their Jewish clientele. It is shocking that many families have relied upon the work of these gentiles to remove their *Shatnez* collars and replace the (linen) canvas with a kosher (cotton) one.

But a certain divine intervention made one customer aware of his error and word spread fast. Within a week, I had 15 suits from this tailor for examination.

The results were as follows: 3 suits had a linen collar that was never removed, 2 suits had a linen (*Shatnez*) collar removed, which had been replaced with another linen collar, 1 suit has stray cotton threads remaining-the tailor had removed a cotton collar which was already kosher-and 9 suits had linen thread or pieces of linen canvas left inside, sewn along its perimeter.

5. On a positive note, Mr. P, a thinking person, brought a suit in a Burberry's store. The store's *Shatnez* tester tested and removed the *Shatnez* collar in the suit, put in a label, and excused himself that he did not have a cotton replacement for him. He said that he would bring it the following week when he came next.

The customer contacted me and asked if I could overnight a collar replacement to the store. I did so, but look what happened. The very next morning, the store contacted Mr. P. telling him that his suit was ready and he should come and pick it up. Mr. P. was amazed that the suit should be ready so early in the morning.

It seemed to be before my shipment would have arrived. I asked him to bring in his suit to be checked.

What did I find? The tailor had repaired the suit with a second linen collar. Mr. P had walked out of that store with a non-*Shatnez* label already on the suit.

I am not qualified to decide who is a competent *Shatnez* tester, but I hope that by now you know that it is not your non-Jewish tailor. For more information ask your local *Shatnez* tester or your rabbi.