

Ask Another Rabbi – A response to the BET Journal “Ask the Rabbi” column on techeiles

By Rabbi Dovid Hojdaⁱ

BET Journal published an “Ask the Rabbi” essay responding to the question, “*What possible reasons are there to say not to wear techeiles? Let's say that Murex is not the chilazon, and we have some strings that have been dyed blue for no reason. What problem could there be in attaching those strings to my tzitzis?*”

Bet Journal format will only allow for a relatively brief response, which I will gear to the general reader.¹

The question asked is a hypothetical, based on a flawed premise.

Serious and knowledgeable people are not dying strings with Murex techeiles for “*no reason.*” They are doing so because of the overwhelming evidence from the world of reality that Murex was used for techeiles at the time of Chazal and the opinions of great poskim that this evidence translates into an opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of techeiles for the first time in more than a thousand years.

For more on this, see, for instance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k6TlBx2XKk> and https://www.techeiles.org/library_main/has-techeiles-been-found/. See as well the excellent pamphlet, <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-meir-halevi-hellman-levush-haaron/>.

The “Ask the Rabbi” article presents Murex techeiles as, at best, a *safek*. Those quoted in the “Ask the Rabbi” essay say it’s less than that, not even a *safek*. And, according to the essay, these Rabbis have “good answers,” showing that the evidence is not compelling at all. I quote:

Additionally, it isn't at all true that the evidence is 'compelling' to everyone that the murex trunculus is the correct fish for dying techeiles. There are good answers to [this question](#), both in terms of archaeological evidence and halakhic literature regarding the identity of the *chilazon*. Rav Asher Weiss and [Rav Shlomo Miller](#), both widely accepted poskim, do not think that there is enough evidence to even raise a doubt, and discourage the use of techeiles ...

Not disclosed to the reader, however, is that the above-cited writings not only do not present counter-arguments, nor “good answers,” but largely do not address -- or acknowledge -- the evidence at all! For instance, one of the authors of the writings cited by “Ask the Rabbi” says at the outset of his written teshuva that, as a matter of principle, he will not consider any arguments or evidence from the world of reality nor its experts. (I prefer to use the term “arguments from reality” over “*olam hamada*,” which in this case includes not only chemistry and biology, but recorded history, artifacts, linguistics, and ancient

¹ For a more detailed discussion, with hundreds of pages of analyses and tens of hours of shiurim, both scientific and Rabbinic, please see <https://www.techeiles.org/> and <https://www.tekhelet.com/>.

literature.) One could perhaps argue that this kind of broad, unqualified, and unexplained dismissal is halachically legitimate, but it does not equate to “a good answer” to the arguments themselves.²

And it is not only the arguments from reality that are not addressed systematically or comprehensively in the above-mentioned writings, but neither are the strongest pro-Murex arguments of contemporary Rabbinic scholars. (I have personally urged one of the most famous poskim in the world that he write a comprehensive teshuva demonstrating how the strongest pro-techeiles arguments are wrong.)

And just because a Rav doesn't wear Murex techeiles, it does not necessarily mean that this is due to their doubts about the *evidence*. Rav Nissan Kaplan, for instance, has said publicly (in recorded shiurim and broadcasts) that he believes that Murex *is* the *chilazon* and it is not because of doubt about this *reality* that he does not wear it, but of deference to Rav Elyashiv z"l.³ Rav Mendel Shafran of Bnei Brak writes similarly to Rav Nissan, saying that broad-based opposition to techeiles is not due to doubts about the *reality* of whether Murex is the Torah's techeiles. On the contrary, the evidence shows that it very likely *is* the techeiles used in the time of Chazal! In Rav Shafran's words, the evidence speaks for itself! Rather, says Rav Shafran, like Rav Nissan, the resistance to techeiles is *unrelated* to the reality of the matter.⁴

Rav Yisroel Belsky z"l agrees. Captured on video, he declares that Murex is “a *vaddai*.” And for him, this translated into wearing it. Similarly, other Rabbonim, like Rav Gershon Melzer, of Mir Yerushalayim⁵, and Rav Benzion Halberstam, Bobover Dayan in Lakewood, and Rav Avrahan Offman, Dayan of the Badatz Eidah haCharedis Yerushalayim⁶, have, upon actually *studying* the evidence in favor as well as the arguments against, become wearers of *techeiles*. Among those is Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, senior posek in Kiryat Sefer and talmid *muvhak* of Rav Elyashiv z"l who, after having studied the matter

² The links below include not just the statements cited by “Ask the Rabbi,” which I urge you to read in context, but detailed refutations of them as well.

For Rav Asher Weiss, see <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-asher-weiss-shlita/> (However, teshuva from Minchas Asher does not appear on this link.)

For Rav Shlomo Miller, see <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-shlomo-miller-shlita/>

For Rav Moshe Shternbuch, <https://www.techeiles.org/hagaon-rav-moshe-shternbuch-shlita/>

³ For Rav Elyashiv's extremely brief teshuva and responses that contextualize it:

<https://www.techeiles.org/hagaon-rav-shalom-elyashiv-ztl/>

⁴ א. מה שלא נתקבל בציבור הרחב שומרי תומ"צ קלה בבחמורה ומדקדקין במצוות אינו משום שיש ערעור על אמיתות התכלת. אדרבה הראיות שמביאים לזיהוי התכלת המקובל היום כחלזון התכלת שבזמן חז"ל, נראין הדברים נכונים שזוהי תכלת של תורה, והדברים משכנעים ומדברים בעד עצמם. ב. וטעם רוב גדולי ישראל שאינם משתמשים בזה אינו משום שמפקפקים באמיתת העניין, אלא משום שבמאתיים שנה האחרונות נקבע כהרגשה פנימית שלא משנים דברים גם אם מן הדין הי' צריך להנהיגם או לשנותם, וזה כהגנה נגד מהרסים המנסים לשנות ולהתאים וכו'. ועד כדי כך נקבע עקרון זה שיש כח בדעת תורה זה לעקור דבר מה"ת כמו מצות תכלת. הכלל, שגם שינוי לטובה רואים חכמי התורה לתחילת פרצה שאחריתה מי ישרנו. ודבר זה הוא בבחינת יכולים חכמים לעקור דבר מן התורה בשב ואל תעשה. ואף שהיו מהגדולים שנהגו בתכלת ראדין כמו שידוע מהמהרש"ם ועוד, הם לא עשו כן אלא לעצמם בצינעא אך לא הנהיגו כן לציבור.

⁵ <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-gershon-meltzer-shlita/>

⁶ <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-amram-opman-shlita/>

thoroughly **and consulting with Rav Elyashiv**, began wearing techeiles on his tallis kotton. He would eventually begin wearing it on his tallis godol as well, **after consultation with Rav Chaim Kanievsky**.⁷

Captured on video, Rav Chaim Kanievsky instructs a questioner that, if he understands the arguments for Murex and is convinced by them, he is *obligated* to wear Murex techeiles.⁸ In a follow-up, delivered in writing by Rav Chaim's Gabbai, Rav Chaim further instructs the questioner that, upon wearing Murex techeiles for the first time, he should say *Shechechiyanu, b'Shem u'Malchus*.⁹

I urge you to carefully study the published arguments for Murex techeiles, readily accessible in the links I provided above. And then honestly ask yourself what, indeed, are the "... *possible reasons not to wear techeiles?*" And then judge for yourself whether the reasons listed by "Ask the Rabbi" suffice. And then, prepared with a clear understanding of the underlying arguments and an ability to cite them, discuss them with your own Rav.

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⁷ This is what he wrote earlier: <https://www.techeiles.org/harav-moshe-mordechai-karp-shlita/>

⁸ https://www.techeiles.org/library_main/harav-chaim-kanievski/

⁹ <https://www.techeiles.org/hagaon-rav-chaim-kanievski-shlita/>