

Shoel U'Mashiv

Disposable Talis Bag

Rabbi Noah Whittenburg

Q - To save space in his luggage while on vacation, a young man used a plastic shopping bag as his *Talis* bag. He asked me what would be the proper way to dispose of the bag when his vacation was over?

A - Why would our friend assume there's any issue with disposing of the bag? The discussion starts with the Gemara Megillah 26A in which the rabbis teach that all *Tashmishei Mitzvah* (items used to fulfill a *Mitzvah*) can be thrown away in the regular manner once they are no longer needed, while *Tashmishei Kedusha* (items which serve and protect holy items) must be set aside in a safe, secluded, honorable place--known as *Geniza*. The examples the Gemara gives of *Tashmishei Mitzvah* are a *Sukkah*, a *Lulav*, a *Shofar* and *Tzitzis*. The examples of *Tashmishei Kedusha* are a *Mezuzah* case, a Torah cover and a *Tefillin* bag.

Where does this holiness come from? In short: contact with holy items.

A *Kadosh* (holy) item retains its elevated status even after it's no longer being used to perform the *Mitzvah*. We elevate the status of simple parchment by writing the words of Torah on it. That is why a *Sefer Torah*, a *Mezuzah* and *Tefillin* are all *Kadosh* (holy) for they contain parchment with words of Torah written on them. Any item specifically used to protect them is *Tashmishei Kedusha*. The *Mishnah Berurah* 154:7 includes a *Tefillin* bag as one of those items.

A *Mitzvah* item, however, loses its elevated status when it is no longer needed for the *Mitzvah* or when it is no longer in the proper condition to perform the *Mitzvah*. The *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 24:1 says that if a *Tzitzis* string falls off a *Talis*, it can be thrown in the garbage, but retains its holiness while it is still connected to the *Talis* and therefore, one must be careful to treat it properly. (The *Rema* there adds that it should preferably be thrown out in a dignified manner). In this case, the *Mitzvah* item is known as *Tashmishei Mitzvah* and the item protecting it is known as *Tashmish D'Tashmishei Mitzvah*. Since the *Mitzvah* item can be thrown out once it is no longer needed, so too the protecting item can be, as well. The *Piskei Teshuvos* 154 footnote 43 says, however, that if any verses are written on the item, then it would require *Geniza*.

So what do we do with our friend's plastic bag?

We classify the plastic bag as *Tashmish D'Tashmishei Mitzvah* and it can be thrown directly into the garbage once he is done with it, preferably in a dignified manner (i.e. in a clean garbage or inside another bag).