

"BODY AND SOUL"  
Nudism as Prank and as Principle

Not every act of popular lunacy is worthy of comment from the pulpit. Nevertheless, the current fad of "streaking," or running undraped in public, is reflective of a more pervasive tendency in society today, and hence merits some analysis from a Jewish perspective.

I should like to refer our discussion to a rather unlikely source. On the first verse in today's portion, Rashi quotes the Sages: ויקרא אל משה, ויקרא לשון חיבה, לשון זירוז, לשון שמאכי השרת משמשים בו.

The word "and He called" denotes affection and industriousness, and the kind of language used by the ministering angels.

Apparently, the Rabbi's curiosity was aroused by the use, in this context, of ויקרא "and He called" instead of וידבר, ויאמר, "He spoke" or "He said." They therefore related the word "call" to the verse in Isaiah who, in his vision of the Seraphic Song, describes the angels and says:

ויקרא זה אל זה ואמר קדוש קדוש קדוש...  
"And they called one to another, saying: holy, holy, holy..."

Now, that angelic "call," according to our liturgy, is of a very special kind. Thus we introduce this passage from Isaiah in our daily prayers by saying"

כולם אהובים, כולם ברורים, כולם גבורים וכולם  
פותחים את פיהם בקדושה ובטהרה...

they are all beloved (thus implying חיבה or love, affection); they are all clear, they are all powerful (thus implying זירוז or responsiveness, industriousness); and they all open their mouths in sanctity and purity (thus the special language of השרת, מלאכי השרת, the ministering angels).

Hence, the divine call to man is a summons to react as do the angels in Isaiah's vision -- with love, with zeal, with holiness. This is, obliquely, a rather full-fledged Jewish program for human conduct!

With this in mind, let me turn to the first of three points I wish to make about nudism not only as a prank but as a principle.

This inclination towards progressively more nakedness is an outgrowth of the permissiveness usually associated with

what is or has been called the New Morality. A number of social philosophers and psychologists, such as Dr. Rollo May, have pointed out that this tendency is not necessarily supportive of more sensuality. On the contrary, if the trend continues it will lead to more widespread impotence! As nudism, whether complete or partial, becomes a social rather than an individual phenomenon, increased exposure will lead to visual satiety, which will in turn lead to lessened biological drives.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were naked, literally shameless -- and did not reproduce. It was only after they developed a sense of **בושה** or shame and dressed, that **וידע אדם את אשתו**, that they knew each other carnally and raised a family.

So the youthful streakers -- who, in addition to childish pranks, are probably motivated by plain exhibitionism -- are, in effect, deadening their own erotic responses, as is society as a whole when it indulges them with a smile.

How ironical! Streaking surely begins as a provocation of the **יצר הרע** (the sexual urge) and yet it leads to the very extinction of that same **יצר הרע**! It reminds one of the recent volume (far more valuable in insight and analysis than a great deal of the nonsense that comes to us from the campus radicals) entitled, Sexual Suicide.

Hence, I accept at face value the assertion of apologists for this youthful phenomenon, that it does not intend to encourage orgies. Indeed not! A Jewish objection would be that it is negating a vital and valuable part of the human psyche -- sexuality -- with which the human race was endowed by the Creator.

**ויקרא** is the summoning of man to fulfill his destiny, **כשין חיבה ודיוק**, in love and dedication. But the streakers are mischievously narcissistic and do not know true **חיבה**, love; and they are fundamentally asexual, and so destroy the inner responsiveness of **זירוד**. If anything, streaking, which seems to be only clowning, is a way-station to reproduction by cloning!

If man refuses to respond to the **ויקרא** of **מלאכי השרת**, to the "call" of the angels, he is reduced to the dumbness of vegetables or even microbes!

The second point is something suggested by my eminent teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik **גאון**, Kedushah

(holiness) thrives in concealment, not in exposure. The holiest place in the world, the קדש קדשים or inner sanctum of the Temple in Jerusalem, was out of bounds except to one man, and then only once a year: the High Priest on Yom Kippur. Its holiness implied distance, unapproachability, hiddenness. Similarly, the sefer Torah may not be profaned by human touch; the Halakhah requires that one's hands be washed if they have touched the inner parts of the scrolls. Furthermore, the scrolls must not be stored unless they are draped -- the exact language is that the sefer Torah must not be ערום -- literally, "naked!" It must be covered with a special mantle.

Hence, the Rav continues, we may learn something about human conduct. The Torah taught us that זו ספר תולדות האדם, "this is the book of the generations of man," implying that man is like a book, The Book. The equation reads: man equals sefer Torah. The scroll is a physical object but it embodies holiness in the form of its message in its letter. And the human being too is a material organism, but he is the domicile of the צלם אלקים, the image of God, and therefore he is holy. As a holy being, he must be kept clothes, no less than the sefer Torah.

Here, the Rav concludes, we may find a major difference between the Greek and the Jewish conceptions of man and man's body. For the Greeks the body had only esthetic value, and beauty is made to be displayed. But Jews considered that the body is also sacred, and the holy must be concealed. Interestingly, the Maccabean revolution, which we commemorate on Hanukkah, revolved to a large extent on the question of the naked games in the gymnasium, introduced by the Syrian-Greeks, and the assimilated Jews who followed them, into Palestine.

I might add to these comments by the Rav a number of supporting insights. When Moses received his first revelation of the burning bush, instead of giving free rein to his curiosity, he averted his gaze (ויסתר משה פניו) because he recognized immediately and intuitively that the sacred must not be profaned by the inquisitive gesture and the gaze of curiosity.

Similarly, the "call" of the angels in Isaiah's vision is accompanied by an interesting description of these angels:

שש כנפים לאחד, שש כנפים לאחד. בשתיים יכסה פניו, בשתיים יכסה רגליו ובשתיים יעופף.

"Each angel had six wings: with two he would cover his face, with two he would cover his feet, and with two he would fly."

Out of six wings, only two were used for flight! Four were used for concealing. But what were they hiding? The angels, after all, have no organs associated with the human sense of shame. Only hands and feet. Yet, even without reference to the erotic or the sensual, the fundamental principle is: holiness requires hiddenness!

Finally, the connotation of "call" as the language of angels suggests another idea (which I have developed in more detail in Faith and Doubt, Chap. XI). Angels are not autonomous beings but representatives of the Creator -- and God Himself, as it were, practices צניעות, modesty.

Modesty, in this sense, is not only a matter of dress and speech. It refers to more than exposure of the human body. It is also an existential quality, it relates to the whole of one's personality. In its broader sense, צניעות is an affirmation of privacy.

Judaism knows of the importance of communication and relationship -- with its emphasis on language and its whole social ethic. But it also knows of the importance of the converse principle, that of privacy. Without privacy there is no "self" to relate to others, to communicate to others. Privacy is that which safeguards the boundaries of our selfhood, that which gives us dignity.

Indeed, צניעות (modesty) is not only a commandment but a model for imitatio Dei. We are summoned to imitate the divine attribute of modesty.

Where do we find God being modest? God reveals Himself in prophecy, in history, in nature. But there are limits to this self-revelation of the divine, beyond which man cannot peer, and into which he dare not intrude: a mysterious core, hidden from the intellectual quest, the theosophical gesture, the visual gaze of man. Ben Sira was speaking for the whole Jewish tradition when he said, as we read in the Apocrypha:

בְּמוֹפְתָא מִמֶּךָ אֵל תִּדְרוּשׁ "in what is wondrous to thee shalt thou not seek." Every Jewish thinker who has thought at all about God has come to the conclusion that God reveals Himself -- but conceals Himself; guides man and yet hides from him; invites man to search Him out, but places bounds beyond which man can proceed only at his own risk. Metaphysically, too, voyeurism is considered reprehensible.

Thus the prophet Micha tells us that one of the things God asks of us is: וְהִנֹּעַ כִּכְתָּ עִם ה' אֶנְקִין

"walk modesty with the Lord thy God." God is modest in the sense of the privacy He enforces on Himself; and man too, walking with Him, must learn this lesson of self-imposed privacy.

Hence, man must always keep some inner core of himself to himself alone. Without secrets there is no self; without mysteries there is no man; without hiddenness there is no humanness.

This teaching of privacy refers to most aspects of life. It refers, for instance, to the halakhic protection of privacy in the laws that relate to neighbors: the principle of הִיזָק רֵאִיָּה, that one must construct a fence between himself and his neighbor so as not to invade his neighbor's privacy; in the law that forbids such activities as wire-tapping; in the protection of the privacy of the mails. And, of course, in the concept of צניעות or privacy with regard to dress, speech, and manners.

From this perspective we may conclude that the "streakers" have cast away not only their clothing, but their dignity which thrives only in privacy. Streaking is a symbol indeed -- not only of protest, not only of boredom, not only of restlessness, but of a self unformed, unprotected, undignified -- and probably non-existent.

If we therefore take exception to the general good-humored indulgence of this newest campus prank, it is not because we are kill-joys or spoil-sports, or because of a generally sour, dour, puritanical disposition. The reasons go far deeper. They touch the "call" which we consider as describing the nature and destiny of man.

Unless man sees himself as summoned to a life of love (חַיִּיבָה), of responsiveness (זִיּוּן), and of sacredness (לְשׁוֹן מְלֹאכֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם), he must diminish to the level of a sub-human. The young streaker has abandoned his own capacity for love, his sense of sacred, his claim on some preserve of privacy.

He is running not only undraped, but undirected. He carries no baggage in his brief race through life -- and has no goals. He is not sure where he is running to, but suspects what he is running from -- himself. He is responding not to the call of the angels beyond, but to the urge of the animal within.

And ultimately he is telling us something about ourselves, our civilization, our society -- that if it has anything on the outside, it is because it has nothing inside.

Nudism of the flesh may well be a reflection of the void of the spirit.