

Dirty Photos

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Most people around the world will have seen the photograph of the group of men and women who sat in the White House lair during the raid on "O" (that's Osama not Obama, of course). What some may not have seen is the [Photoshopped version published by a Chasidic newspaper](#) in New York called Der Zeitung, in which the two females in the room, including Hillary Clinton, were removed. As they explained, "We do not publish pictures of women in our newspaper." Never mind that they have broken the law by tampering with an official White House document. When did they ever give a toss about the law? That's surely, as Nietzsche would have said, only for the others. Once again they have succeeded admirably in making a laughingstock out of Orthodox Judaism, as if we didn't already have enough problems.

But of course this is not new. Anyone familiar with ultra-Orthodox schoolssuch as the Yesodei Hatorah in Antwerp knows that their authorities regularly go through state textbooks cutting out unsuitable pictures. I recall when the Hasmonian High School in London put stickers over naked African breast in a geography textbook. The amusing thing is the mindset of God's policemen. They are so completely out of touch they were unaware that most of the children they were trying to protect from corruption spend the summer vacations around Mediterranean resorts where they play in and out and round about females in bikinis and topless (not all of them likely to offer any temptation).

If Hillary had been naked or her décolletage was unseemly, I might feel less strongly. But she was very modestly dressed and demur and there was nothing sexually arousing about her unless you include her hair. But then Donald Trump's is more likely to arouse than hers. I find it offensive to women that the fundamentalists of all shades expect them to be non-persons, Photoshopped out of history and cover themselves from tip to toe while no one questions what's wrong with men they are so easily turned to paroxysms of sexual lust. Let's blame their wives. It's all Eve's fault. If you don't want to see a woman find another photograph or print a picture of a beard instead. Don't mislead.

There is a problem, I agree, with the way sex is thrown into one's face at many street corners in open societies. I am embarrassed by much of what is available on primetime television. I'm not sure I'd want to go to see many movies nowadays in the company of my grown children any more, for fear of feeling acutely uncomfortable at what I might be shown. The extent to which youngsters are exposed, encouraged, and pressurized to throw off any kind of restraint or self control is frightening. The Free World has disseminated devalued, degraded, and trivialized sex to the point that it seems no different to sucking a lollipop. But what is the response? To retreat into a cocoon? To bury one's head like an ostrich? As the Good Book says "stolen waters are sweeter, secret bread tastes better".

The fact is that closed societies still have problems: domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse. They are all there hidden under the black. Where would you rather live? Under the Taliban or Times Square? The more you close

up a society, the more the evil runs underground. People think they can get away with things because they are protected by the ayatollahs. Ayatollahs and rabbis think they can get away with it because their gear gives them privileges. It is no different to the way the rich sexually used and abused the poor in Victorian times and before.

Behavioral constraints are one thing. We are all constrained in one way or another by laws, rules, taxes, conventions, and social pressure. It's the attempt to control the mind I despise most of all, because that teaches hypocrisy. It teaches people not to think for themselves, which leads to the worst form of dictatorship. It is like education. One must encourage and guide people to think for themselves. Otherwise it is called indoctrination. And you know where that word comes from!

Moses Mendelssohn, in his book "Jerusalem", asserted that Judaism had no dogmas. By this he meant to differentiate Judaism as a religion of behavior, ethical and ritual, from Christianity as a religion of theology. Although he was an impeccably Orthodox Jew, he was excoriated by Eastern European Orthodoxy for enabling assimilation by translating the Bible into German. Tell that to Artscroll!!! The sad fact that his children converted out had more to do with the anti-Semitism of European society and the desire to get on in life than it did with genuine religious faith.

Several modern thinkers, amongst them Menachem Kellner and Marc Shapiro, have highlighted the fact that historically Jewish thought has been highly flexible and un-dogmatic and the current Orthodoxy of Thought is not typical. This doesn't mean that anything goes and nothing matters. There are basic ideas and principles that have to be engaged with, but the Bible never uses the expression "You must believe that..." It invites one to engage, emotionally just as much as intellectually. Our traditional texts wisely avoid defining and wisely avoid trying to control minds. There are views that are heterodox. But so long as you live in a way the Torah approves of, that is what matters. That is what I despair about and dislike in so much of religion around the world now. Any thing challenging must be wrong. If you find a text that is problematic, instead of dealing with it, say it must be a forgery. Powerful rabbis for years have been saying this about new commentaries unearthed in ancient libraries; opinions, even expressed by renowned giants, that the pygmies do not approve of, must be forgeries. Muslim scholars now do this over recently discovered variants in early Koran manuscripts.

It is all part of the same pathology. If you don't like the argument, pretend it isn't there. There's something you don't want to see? Photoshop it out and it's gone. It is gone in the minds of the censors, but human minds are beautifully flexible things. You can damage them but they are resilient.

Website Note: The complete text of several of Jeremy's books have been added to the [Jeremy Rosen Online website](#), including historical works about Kopul Rosen and Carmel College, as well as fictional stories. These books are also available to purchase in bound form through Lulu.com. Additionally, the website has been upgraded such that comments can be made on any and all of Jeremy's writings. So feel free to take advantage of the new functionality to let Jeremy know what you think.