

Skirt Lifting

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

My anger at the Strauss-Kahn affair stems both from a Jewish and a purely secular point of view. I am not prejudging the issue. A person is “legally” innocent until the verdict is delivered. But even if it transpires that he is innocent, still there is a pathology he represents that repels me. (Anthony Wiener’s Twitter farce, of course, is neither as sexually oppressive nor as offensive, just juvenile and a reminder how self-destructive adult males can be.)

When people are given too much power and authority, they get to feel they are above the law. There always have been and will be abuses; no matter whether it’s rabbis, priests, mullahs, politicians, or bankers.

It’s not simply the sex. As King Solomon said (and he ought to have known), “There is no man on earth who only does good and never sins.” Most humans are fallible. The Bible itself tells the story of Midian’s successful tactic of using sex to thwart the Israelite advance. The Talmud says, “There are no guarantees when it comes to sex” Ketubot 13b etc. So it is not the normative male condition of giving in to temptation that is the issue here. It is what I believe to be a matter of primitive male aggression towards women. To make matters worse, it is still too often justified or minimized by like-minded males.

French journalist Jean-Francois Khan typifies the secular point of view. DSK was, he says, merely indulging in “troussage domestique”, a typically French expression which delicately translated means “lifting the skirts of domestic servants”. Jack Lang the former French minister declared, “It’s not as though he killed anyone.” Henri Bernard Levy accuses the Americans of overreacting. Sadly, they are all paragons of French intellectual society betraying the hypocrisy of their calling. They share a similar secular Jewish background as well as a track record of philandering, for which they are, more often than not, rewarded by their society.

If this is not “imperialism” at its modern worst I don’t know what else is. Women who are forced through poverty, circumstances, or simply the desire to succeed in a society still heavily weighted against them, are vulnerable and scared. They know that no one will believe them and that society will ignore their predicament. They will be hauled through the courts and maligned and besmirched. They will be the ones punished. It’s a predator’s world.

It derives from a similar male mental aberration as that which is the fate of women in many Muslim societies where if they are raped they themselves will be blamed, punished, even killed because it must have been their fault or family honor has been offended. They are doubly victims.

It happens in other ways in the workplace. In our corrupt financial world, ethically motivated whistleblowers are more than likely to be punished than

the criminals they had the guts to expose.

There was a time where male rulers made use of the "[droit du seigneur](#)", the law of "prima noctis", that gave them the right to take all virgin brides in their domains first. And I agree you can find plenty of cases of powerful women abusing their power sexually—think of Catherine the Great. We like to think we are a more ethical world now where secular values have supposedly advanced over religious ones imposed by fear and authority. Well my dears, it hasn't happened yet. Although I do agree secular courts are more likely to do something about it than most religious ones.

In the case of DSK, he has a record a mile long of affairs with subordinates, of pressurizing employees into supposedly consensual liaisons. He was already investigated once at the IMF for an inappropriate affair; the inquiry, while exonerating him of course (it was her fault), agreed that the IMF had a culture of sexual exploitation. So regardless of the merits of this particular case, he has already been found wanting on ethical grounds. Not that that matters in France. Mitterrand had a mistress and an illegitimate child housed and fed by the state. Chirac was corrupt financially as well, but that did not faze the French. On the contrary, it seemed a positive recommendation, for ruling like with like.

And here is the Jewish angle. Dominique Strauss-Kahn always feared that French anti-Semitism would block his prospects of winning the presidency. Now he has done it to himself another way. He has never been a practicing Jew. His third wife is more overtly Jewish and she insisted on a religious ceremony, but he has never been associated with anything religious. In court his lawyer asked for him to be allowed to attend religious services once a week. What do we make of that? Is he, as a Frenchman, now inclined towards Catholicism and its convenient system of confession? Or does he think attending a synagogue in New York will curry favor with New Yorkers and the chance of some Jews on the jury.

I have always detested the hypocrisy of certain types of Orthodox men who think they can play away from home and get away with it. There are far too many of them if the problems I have been asked to try to solve over the years are anything to go by. But of course it is not only a religious hypocrite that gives Jews a bad name.

We can argue about the relative merits of the American and the French legal system. I am actually pro-Napoleon, even if I dislike France. But at least in America the dirty laundry eventually gets washed in public. In France it is simply recycled.