

"VIRTUES OF NAKEDNESS Physical & Psychological Health"

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Whether we admit it consciously or not, our basic core considerations revolve directly or indirectly around our own physical bodies. Many conventions and taboos about our bodies have become artificially established in our culture through the centuries, some good, some bad.

I would like to examine this core concern of all of us: our own physical body. What should it be or not be surrounded by in order to bring out its full potential in function and ability?

If the world were totally safe, always comfortably warm and fully loving without reservation and without exploitation, perhaps most people would spend a lot of time naked. Even now many people spend more time in the naked state than is commonly realized. Certainly most people bathe naked; many sleep naked; and many private activities besides sexual ones are performed naked. Housework, for example, is frequently done in the nude when no one else is around.

We were all born totally naked. No one had little scuba outfits when in the uterus. Naked is the way we come and naked is the way we really are now. The clothes we wear are not part of us--we're stark naked under there. Nearly everyone has those anatomic parts we seem to try so hard to hide on a conscious level while on a subconscious one we frequently overemphasize and flaunt with clothing styles and apparel devices. If you're a normal adult you have either a penis and scrotum or vulva and developed breasts. Nearly everyone has an anus too. We all know what's there but in our society we still usually want to hide it from others. Let's look at why we do this because all of the reasons are not obvious nor are they all valid.

FIRST OF ALL LET'S REMIND OURSELVES again that we were all born naked and in fact the natural state throughout life is to be naked. If we can set aside a number of considerations temporarily such as modesty, need to keep warm, etc. and if we can be honest with ourselves, we will admit that being nude is very comfortable. Take the case of any young children. Toddlers would rather be nude. They don't want to wear diapers and keeping them in clothes requires some adult effort. Most parents have made the observation of how free, active and joyful a young child becomes when undressed. You, my dear friend, are still the same in this regard as you were as a young child if you look at your innermost feelings.

There is a commonly held opinion that clothing, covering and otherwise hiding the human body has something to do with morality. Somehow, it is felt, that by covering the body, especially (currently) the genitalia, buttocks and female breasts, sexual activity will tend to be limited to that which the society or culture generally condones. However, studies of various cultures characterized by different degrees of dress from total nakedness to complete or almost complete covering of the entire body show no clear correlation between sexual promiscuity and undress. In fact, there is no established, intact culture or society in the world now or in history that has had the incidence of venereal disease that modern western society has. Venereal disease may be

taken as a measure of a society's level of sexual promiscuity. Western society is able to survive the effects of venereal diseases of epidemic proportions due to rampant sexual immorality only through the intervention of extensive medical treatments, which, by the way, are far from adequate.

Clothing is not the key to increasing public morality. To be sure, we must recognize that there is commonly a perceived association between nakedness and immorality. That is, if a society (like our own generally) does not permit nonsexual mixed social nudity, then nudity almost by definition has a significant sexual connotation. Can we be surprised at this? We need to recognize that this is of our own making; it need not be so by the nature of things.

Most of us are taught as children over and over by parents, relatives, teachers and others that nakedness is bad, although it's usually made relative in various ways. It's all right to be naked for the doctor, for example. Sometimes for young children at least, nakedness may be tolerated before family members or even for some recreational activities such as at the seashore. But as we grow up, nakedness in front of others becomes less and less acceptable except perhaps in private in the context of sexuality.

Ancient writings often reveal interesting insight. For example, in the Biblical account of the garden of Eden, it is only after sin began that concern over being naked became an issue. It was only man's guilt and shame over breaking God's commandment that resulted in his (not God's) institution of clothes. Nowhere in the Bible is nudity directly prohibited. The situation is similar today. Clothes frequently represent guilt and an attempt to deny the sexual thoughts and desires every normal person has. Except to the extent that expectation produces its own effect, clothes have no significant value in controlling sexuality. In fact, there is considerable evidence that sexual aberrations are stimulated by clothing practices.

In our society, nakedness is associated with two basic activities, namely: hygienic functions such as bathing, changing clothes, etc. and sexuality. If we were naked at other times as for sunbathing, sports, exercising and even just relaxing, the strong association with sexuality would be weakened. But now if a person were to take off his or her clothes in public, it would probably be interpreted as criminally or psychologically deviant. One could not just disrobe because of the heat or because one's clothes were too tight or otherwise uncomfortable. This would not be accepted as just the matter-of-fact thing it might have otherwise been.

Sociological studies of ethnic groups in which nudity is common have demonstrated that there is no cause and effect relationship between being naked and immorality. Social nudists also exhibit this lack of association. Still, it is clear that many people perceive an association between nudity and overt sexuality. From the standpoint of scientific psychology it can be demonstrated that this connotation of nudity is no more than a learned sexual fetish. It is not an innate [human] characteristic.

Merely mentioning nudity and nakedness in our society generally brings forth connotations of

sexuality and pornography. We MUST recognize that these associations are not fixed or universal by any means. Nudity in some circles and some societies is completely divorced from sexual overtones. It may have no significant meaning in itself or it may indicate such diverse conditions as poverty, humility and, perhaps surprisingly to some, commonly even a state of sacredness and holiness.

THERE IS VALUE IN UNLEARNING the sexual connotation of nudity because nude activities provide many physical and health benefits not fully obtainable otherwise, among which are: greater freedom of movement which is important in exercise and work; greater appreciation of the beauty of the human body even with faults and defects; regular and controlled nude sunbathing enhances resistance to disease, provides more effective and natural vitamin D and calcium balance, reduces the effect of stress, decreases blood pressure, decreases resting heart rate, decreases blood cholesterol, decreases excessive blood sugar, increases muscular strength and endurance, improves many skin diseases such as psoriasis, reduces depression, reduces risk of internal cancer as well as heart and blood vessel disease. Because of more natural testicular function produced by a cooler scrotum, nudity reduces male infertility, impotence, nodular prostatic enlargement with resultant urinary tract obstruction, as well as reducing the risk of testicular and probably prostatic cancer. Nakedness provides relief from the harmful effects of clothing and shoes such as mechanical constriction which may cause deformities, poor lymphatic and blood circulation, inadequate breathing, compromised digestion, hernias, fibrocystic disease of the breast (as well as possibly breast cancer), varicose veins, formation of blood clots and interference with the ability to relax. The occlusive effects of clothing include increased risk of infections of the vagina, bladder, perianal skin, feet and so forth. Lack of natural circulation causes increased body and foot odors. Increased risk of falls can be traced to slippery shoe soles as well as shoes interfering with feelings and tactile perception. The risk of communicable diseases is reduced because skin rashes, open sores, etc. are not hidden by clothing and inappropriate associations can thereby be avoided.

If the thought comes to mind that NEARLY nude would pretty much accomplish the same thing, remember that there are important reasons to particularly expose the very body parts that "modesty" might want covered. It is precisely the skin of the genitalia, buttocks, perianal areas and breasts which benefits most from the drying and cooling effect of free air flow as well as the drying antimicrobial and other desirable attributes of sunlight itself. Logically if any parts should be covered at all it would make more sense to cover the face and hands since the skin of these parts is already liable to more than its share of sunlight, etc. by ordinary daily activities in the clothed state. TOTALLY nude at appropriate times is really the only way the full benefits can be obtained.

Sociological studies have shown that social nudists generally have higher moral values than the general population. In addition, nudist families are more stable than average. Children exposed to the social nudist lifestyle grow up with [FAR] fewer sexual hangups and aberrations than control groups. This should not be surprising since much sexually deviant behavior has a significant component of exhibitionism or voyeurism, the point of which is largely lost in a totally nude group of people. By making nakedness an ordinary, matter-of-fact, common

experience, unassociated with sexuality, the unhealthy prurient interest in pornography would be considerably lessened.

The prospect of non-sexual nudity could generally be expected to generate at least a limited increased concern for our own body appearances. This is a highly desirable aspect to the extent that it encourages appropriate attention to diet, exercise and other lifestyle considerations.

Of course it's not practical to be totally nude at all times. Clothing often is very functional and is desirable to protect against excessive heat or cold. Clothes may guard against too much sun or ultraviolet exposure, rain, snow, trauma and other injury particularly in the work place, and so forth. Pockets are useful. Uniforms may be necessary for identification and other purposes. There are useful sanitary functions of clothing. No one could reasonably deny these important and legitimate purposes of clothing but this is not to say that nudity does not also present important and legitimate purposes at appropriate times and in appropriate places.

Clothes serve many useful functions even though successfully improving morality is not one of them. In fact clothes are frequently overtly designed to be particularly sexually provocative and often, if not usually, are more sexually arousing than total nudity might be. It would be a step toward better psychological and physical health if we could accept public nudity in a matter-of-fact way at least to a limited extent. Certainly no one would be harmed by such a practice in designated areas and at designated times for specific legitimate purposes as sunbathing, exercising and for various sports. Many people have enjoyed nude jogging, swimming, sunbathing and other similar activities in secluded places for years. Not everyone has convenient access to isolated places where this can be done privately without possible offense to others. It would be an appropriate use of public areas such as parks to have designated, clothes-optional, areas and times when legitimate nude activities are permitted. Actually, it could be argued that it's even more appropriate to turn the situation around and designate times and places where clothes must be worn (textile areas) so that those who are offended by the natural body state and who are unable or unwilling to separate nudity and sexuality, can assemble together without fear of having to deal with nature and the truth.

Let us look forward to the day when the vision of society will be cured of its crippling moral myopia. Certainly standards of morality are essential to the efficient functioning of a society and as a framework for dedicated, potentially vulnerable inter-personal relationships. No one could reasonably deny this. The problem here is that society now confuses morality with fashion and convention Let's clearly focus on the true issues.

IT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED the most beautiful creation, God's crowning glory, is the human body--yes, genitalia and all! Stop for a moment to contemplate your hand for example (or any other body part for that matter). What an absolutely amazing creation it is! Think of the complex structure and design; consider the engineering involved, the complicated physical and chemical reactions constantly occurring; and most of all now realize how beautiful it is and how beautiful your whole body is! We can be so bold as to declare that it is still so even with imagined faults and defects such as asymmetry, congenital deformity, warts, scars, traumatic and

surgical amputations, skin rashes and what-have-you. It is only made more interesting in its variety. The genuine love and concern of others will transcend what you think you look like and what deficiencies you may think you have. However you appear in the naked state, you should realize that your body IS BEAUTIFUL. Actually you need to realize that you, yourself, are the most beautiful thing ever created. And to add glory upon glory, you can make yourself even more beautiful through application of the optimal lifestyle, including specific attention to the five keys to optimal health:

1. Diet with vitamin and mineral supplementation.
2. Exercise and work, physical and mental.
3. Environmental factors such as sunlight, fresh clean air and appropriate clothing (or lack of it).
4. Personal interactions emphasizing love, affection, and play--all within the framework of psychological and physical disease prevention.
5. Attitudinal attunement, which is the development of an unfettered view of reality and which is essential to personal inward peace and equanimity.

As glorious as the human body may be as an object of beauty, it is even more astoundingly exquisite when fulfilling its functional potential--that is, when it is being properly used. For example, as beautiful as a woman's breasts may be, they are never lovelier than when nursing her infant.

EVEN MORE IMPORTANT than the numerous physical health benefits associated with nudity are the psychological and attitudinal advantages induced by the realization of the moral neutrality and simple innocence of nudity per se. When we realize that the coverings we have placed on our bodies have nothing to do with desirable moral attributes, the way is open to the startling revelation that our psychological envelopes, attitudes and opinions may also constitute undesirable armor shielding us from otherwise attainable beauty and truth.

Psychological shells or envelopes, like clothing, can protect and insulate against undesirable environmental forces and situations. Such envelopes, again like clothing, can also have adverse consequences, such as mental illness, inability to reach out to others across the barriers of differentness, and may also be the cause for mankind's most serious illness -- the inability to love others.

It's time to be able to assume psychological nudity of which physical nudity is symbolic. Let us shed the silly and harmful apparel of hate, sloth and the desire to exploit. Let us truly be naked, inwardly as well as externally. Let us be free to soar in pure love and delight. Free to learn and be open to creativity. Free again to be the real person, the simple child we all really are. Free to love and play.