

In the beginning

Part 8 – “They felt no shame”

When God brought all those animals and birds to the man to name them in **Genesis 2:19-20** it must have dawned on the man very quickly that none of them were even remotely like himself, because they all had fur or feathers. He was the only creature with just skin and nothing growing out of it. He was the only creature, in other words, whose features were completely noticeable.

Having one's bodily features totally open to public view like that gave humans a word that no other creature could claim. It was the word “naked,” which first appears in **verse 25** - “The man and his wife were both naked.” And the Hebrew word for naked means just that: it's *arummim* (pronounced arermeem, ‘a’ as in ‘cat’), meaning nude, where nothing is hidden or concealed. You're out in the open in your birthday suit is what the Hebrew means.

But why would God do that? Why would he deliberately make those two humans naked and exposed like that, and so vulnerable, therefore, to heat and cold? The temperature climbed and cooled in the garden too, because in **Genesis 3:8** God “was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” At night, then, did the man and woman have to snuggle up in a pile of leaves to stay warm, and in the heat of the day stay in the shade so they didn't get sunburn? And would humans only be able to live in areas of the world with a temperate climate and no extremes of heat and cold? Was that God's intent in making humans naked, that they stay put in a thin strip of land close to the equator?

Or does the mention of them being naked have another purpose? It's clearly mentioned for a reason, and a reason that could be understood by the Israelites too, because Genesis was written, first of all, for them. And to the Israelites it would certainly have meant something, because at the time Genesis was written they were in a “naked” state themselves. They were out in the desert, vulnerable and exposed too. They had no protection from enemies, an ugly reminder of which they'd just experienced on their flight from Egypt, because it looked like they'd disappeared from sight in the desert, but to their horror the Egyptian charioteers had no trouble locating them and would have destroyed them except for God's intervention at the Red Sea.

Is there a hint here, therefore, that God had deliberately placed Israel in the same naked state as Adam and Eve, with nothing natural they could depend on to protect, conceal or cover them? Well, why not? God hadn't given Adam and Eve anything natural to protect them either. Without fur or feathers they were open to the elements. But the Israelites were just as open to the elements in the desert. They had no bushes or trees to conceal them, and no weapons or armour to protect them. And, what's more, God had put them in this situation on purpose, just as he'd made Adam and Eve naked on purpose.

So, if you were an Israelite reading this story in Genesis, what would you be thinking? I imagine you'd be looking for some sort of explanation as to why God had deliberately put you in this position, and why, perhaps, God had also made Adam and Eve so naked and vulnerable when, in the very next verse, right after mentioning they were naked, the serpent turns up. So here they are, in their naked, exposed state, and God launches the serpent on them. What did God think he was doing? Or was there something he wanted to get across here, not only for Israel, but for anybody else feeling naked and vulnerable too?

Well, as an Israelite you'd soon be in desperate need of an answer to that question, because God's about to launch you into Canaan, and the reports coming back from the Israelite spies who checked out Canaan are frightening. The country is full of giants, they say, and the cities are fortified and strong (Numbers 13:31-33). And who are you as Israelites by comparison? You're a badly beaten up group of former slaves with no army and no training at all in hand-to-hand combat, and at least two thirds of you are women, children and senior citizens. The whole idea of you going on a military campaign to invade and conquer a powerful, hostile country, therefore, is completely ludicrous.

If God had done this to you on purpose, though, there must be a reason, but why rescue you from Egypt only to give you a job in another country that would try just as hard to destroy you, and you cannot do a thing to stop them? Was there some help here in Genesis, therefore, as to what God was up to?

Well, yes, because God had done exactly the same thing in Genesis 2 and 3. He'd made a man, given him the job of guarding the garden he'd created, but then informs the man he cannot do the job on his own. And then, when God provides a perfectly suitable helper for the man in the shape of a woman, she turns out to be just as naked and vulnerable as he is. So now we've got two naked, vulnerable people going up against the serpent. It didn't make sense.

But had the man and the woman experienced something remarkable in Eden already, having **God** right there with them? They were in his presence every day, so had something of his glory rubbed off on them? Had they been clothed in a protective light, for instance, like the light that shone from Moses' face after he too was in God's presence on Mount Sinai?

Many Jews today believe that's exactly what happened, that Adam and Eve were clothed in a protective light from being in God's presence every day. And why not, when God filled Solomon's temple with his presence, and it too was a bright shining light? And when the Israelites left Egypt God's presence was also with them in a brightly shining pillar of fire every night. And one day Paul talks of humans having spirit bodies just like the spirit body Jesus has, and he shines too. Was that the original state of Adam and Eve as well, then, that they basked in this protective light of God's presence, which would have continued had they obeyed God, enabling them to live without clothes and without danger in any climate or situation? What other explanation is there for the man and woman being naked and having no need of any protective clothing?

But what does it matter how the man and woman survived being naked? Well, it may not matter much to us, but it certainly mattered to the Israelites. They were out in the desert with no protection at all, and they were being reminded every day as they got closer and closer to Canaan just how naked and vulnerable and pathetically unprepared they were for taking on a hostile and powerful enemy. The whole thing was so ludicrous it was embarrassing even thinking about it.

But - and here's the good bit - because in **Genesis 2:25**, when "the man and wife were both naked, **they felt no shame.**" They didn't feel the least bit embarrassed by their condition. They didn't feel that their nakedness and vulnerability posed a problem at all. Just because they didn't have fur or feathers like all the other creatures, it didn't make them feel weak or inferior, or frightened. They weren't the least bit concerned about themselves.

Self-consciousness, in other words, that terribly destructive brute that carries all sorts of viruses with it like fear, worry about the future, and feelings of inferiority compared to others, didn't even enter the picture. None of those things existed in Eden. Instead, it was like being four years old again and happily running around naked without a care in the world. But when you're in God's presence that's how it is; you feel utterly safe and free.

When the Israelites read the word “naked,” therefore, it happily reminded them that in God’s presence their vulnerability compared to the people they’d be coming up against shouldn’t make them feel ashamed or inferior at all. They could be just as free of all that stuff as Adam and Eve were in God’s presence.

God made sure, then, that before the man and woman faced the serpent, and before Israel faced their troubles in Canaan, they’d already had a good taste of what it was like being in his presence first. Everything felt fine. You felt strong and safe, as if you were wrapped in a protective cloak.

And that was good - that you’d already experienced what God’s presence did for you - because there was **also a word of warning** contained in that word “naked” too. In English it’s hidden, but to an Israelite reading it in Hebrew it would have popped off the page and made him take notice.

The Hebrew word for “naked” in **Genesis 2:25** is **arummim**, which on its own doesn’t mean much, right? But in the very next verse (3:1) the first four letters of **arummim, a-r-u-m**, mean “crafty” when describing the serpent. In Hebrew, then, there are hints here of a connection that needs to be taken note of.

They’re not directly connected, as some Jewish experts go to great lengths to explain, because **arummim** is the plural version of the word **a-r-o-m** with an ‘o’ rather than a ‘u’, but in Hebrew **arom** (with an ‘o’) and **arum** (with a ‘u’) SOUND the same, and it’s typical of Hebrew to use similar sounding words with different and even opposite meanings to get a point across. They loved dabbling in that stuff, as did the author of Genesis, and in this case he gets really clever because **arom** with an ‘o’, the singular of **arummim** describing the nakedness of the man and wife, can also mean crafty, just like **arum** with a ‘u’ that describes the craftiness of the serpent.

Within that one word “naked,” then, there are hints of two meanings. Was all this intentional, therefore, to convey something important? Well, think about it, that God has got this man and woman trained and ready to go in ruling the world together under his guidance, and he’s got them feeling utterly safe and free in his presence, without a self-conscious or worried thought in their heads. And the word “naked” describes that beautifully. They’re totally open in their relationship with each other and with God. They have nothing to hide or conceal. What we have here, then, is the ideal condition for humans to be in. There hasn’t been a more ideal situation than this in the entire history of the planet.

It tells us clearly that this is how God wants the world ruled, by people with this kind of heart and nature, because he starts off his rulership plans for humans with a man and woman who are totally open and free and trusting in their relationship with him and each other, with no hang-ups of guilt or shame, and no hidden agenda. It's just like the openness and transparency experienced by newlyweds and courting couples, that starts them off so beautifully into their married lives together. They are the perfect example of **arummim**, and if we all retained our **arummim** natures imagine how different our world would be.

But inside that word **arummim** is also a red flashing light that all is not going to be "blissfully happy ever after." It's there for all to see in those first four letters of **arummim**, because they spell **arum**, and that is the word used in **Genesis 3:1** when the writer says, "the serpent was more crafty (**arum**) than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made."

On the one hand, then, we've got this lovely word **arummim** describing the ideal human condition of having everything out in the open and nothing concealed, picturing total trust and love between man and wife and between humans and God - BUT - contained right inside **arummim** is the word **arum**, which means the absolute opposite. It means subtle, wily, cunning, shrewd, and clever. It's not out in the open at all. It conceals and hides. And to an Israelite reading this, it would have rung a large bell in his head, because he knew all about **arums** from the culture of the day. **Arums** described exactly what the ancient Near Eastern world called "chaos" creatures, or chaos monsters.

A classic example in ancient Near East literature is the chaos creature called **Anzu**, an ugly bird-like monster that sneakily steals the tablet of destinies from the father of the gods, taking his power from him. Anzu then uses that power he's stolen to cause utter chaos in the entire cosmos. But a young god, Ninurta, is sent out to destroy him, and by a clever piece of trickery of his own, involving disguising his arrows as Anzu's feathers, he kills Anzu. And there are many other stories like this in ancient Near Eastern literature, of combats against chaos creatures, so the appearance in Genesis of a serpent out to cause chaos would have been a familiar picture for the Israelites.

But why would God actually CREATE a chaos creature and then let it loose on the man and woman in Eden too? Why was that necessary, and what sort of meaning would it have had for the Israelites? What sort of meaning does it have for anybody else for that matter, including us?

Well, we already know in Genesis 1:2 that something had reduced our planet to a lifeless, dark, inhospitable, non-functioning place covered in a deep blanket of water. How it happened is not explained, because it's more important to the writer of Genesis to show how the planet we now reside in came to be, and who was responsible for it. He starts Genesis, then, with a clear picture of the God **Elohim** being the source of everything we see and experience on this planet. It was he who made our world a light-filled, productive, beautiful place.

But there hints of danger too, because in Genesis 2 God tells the man to take care of the garden, which in Hebrew included the meaning of guarding it.

But guard the garden against what exactly? Well, God's about to make that clear in Genesis 3, because he creates a chaos creature and confronts the man and woman with it. He actually creates a taste of chaos, and what other explanation can there be for that - other than chaos still being a real danger?

In other words, **Elohim** is preparing the man and woman for what their future holds as rulers and guardians of his creation. And it's not going to be all plain sailing. There will be opposition, and they need to know in what form that opposition comes so they can learn how to deal with it. Why that opposition exists and where it came from isn't explained either, but why would God create a chaos creature if chaos didn't exist and it was nothing to be concerned about?

But first, before he confronts the man and woman with the chaos creature, God gives them a taste of **arummim**, so not only do they have something to compare with what the chaos creature offers, they also have the antidote to chaos creeping back into the world. All they need do is preserve their lovely, open, trusting **arummim** relationship with God and each other, with nothing hidden or concealed, and that will keep chaos at bay.

But in that word **arummim** lurks **arum**, to get the point across, in terms those Hebrews would understand, that there is a very real danger out there as well. It's the same point God got across to Cain in **Genesis 4:7**, that "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

So God had to make this serpent really crafty to make those two humans aware of the danger they were about to face, and to get the point across that for them to rule and guard this planet properly they would need to grapple with the danger and defeat it. They must MASTER it.

That's why we've got this play in the words **arummim** and **arum**, to make it clear that we've got a battle on our hands, keeping God's ideal in sight on the one hand, and knowing it can be wrecked so easily on the other.

And what wrecks it is what we see this **arum** serpent doing. Instead of being **arummim** like the man and his wife and being totally open and transparent concealing nothing, he's **arum**, craftily concealing and hiding his real motives. Instead of encouraging the lovely **arummim** trust in God that the man and his wife had, he's **arum**, craftily sewing doubt in God. Instead of continuing to free these two humans from all cares, he feeds in a worry. Instead of keeping their minds off themselves, he makes them self-conscious as to what they're missing out on. And instead of supporting God's warning about consequences to keep them away from danger, he dilutes the consequences by saying they won't die.

And the crazy thing is, the man and his wife went with the **arum** and ditched their **arummim**. They ditched the lovely state they'd been in for a shot at what God had warned them against. It was a horribly embarrassing defeat, because they hit the canvas face down, out cold, without even throwing a punch. And even more amazing is that at no point did they think to consult with God. It was as if God had **never** been present with them at all.

Result? For the first time in their lives the man and his wife felt shame. Well, it's not surprising is it? God had perfectly prepared and equipped them to take on this serpent and beat it, just like parents prepare their children for the dangers of the real world so they're not caught out by it. It wasn't a foregone conclusion, therefore, that the serpent would win. The man and woman could have beaten this **arum** or even tamed it and won it over with their own argument for the joys of being **arummim**. But instead they publicly humiliated themselves, before both God and the serpent. How embarrassingly and shamefully weak and pathetic they'd been, like so many girls and women you see portrayed in movies who fall for a slick-talking, motive-concealing, consequence-diluting charmer of a man, and they sit there blubbering at how stupid and pathetic they've been.

Too late now, though, because the eyes of the man and his wife are now opened to a whole new world of guilt and shame at having let God down. And it was through these new eyes that they now looked at each other as well in **Genesis 3:7** and felt shame in publicly displaying their nakedness to each other. How awful that they no longer felt anything for the lovely **arummim** state they'd been in before. In one fell swoop it meant nothing anymore.

So let's bring this all up to date for the Israelites, who are about to face their own crafty serpents when they enter Canaan, because Canaan will be full of highly seductive gods claiming expertise in divine matters, just like the serpent in Eden. So it's going to be a battle supreme, holding on to that lovely **arummim** in the face of some very clever **arums**. And there'll be no getting out of it either, because God's now chosen you, Israel, as his guardians against chaos, just like he chose the man and his wife to guard the garden. So just like them you have to face the enemy head on as well. Sorry, Israel, but that's the way it has to be.

And the enemy will be just as crafty, and have exactly the same aim, of making belief in God feel like an embarrassment. How, for instance, can you Israelites believe in a God who puts you through such trials and tribulations? And how can you, Adam and Eve, believe in a God who won't allow you access to knowledge he knows full well will help you? Oh, the **arums** are crafty all right, because it's super hard for us humans to not think God's being unfair. Why, if he really cares for us, does he constantly make life so difficult?

And the Israelites really had trouble with that. They never really believed God cared. It was always one trial after another, despite the clear evidence that God got them through every trial in one way or another. God, in other words, was doing his part in preserving their lovely **arummim** relationship with him, where they never needed to feel shame or embarrassment trusting in him. But it was tough accepting their nakedness and the position God had deliberately put them in, of being so totally helpless and vulnerable. It didn't feel good at all.

But that's why Genesis was written, to remind the Israelites that being naked wasn't a problem at all **when God's presence was with you**. God's presence was like a protective cloak that would get them through anything, just like God's presence protected Adam and Eve from cold and heat without them having fur or feathers. God's presence would have enabled humans to be naked in any climate, just like his presence would have protected Israel in any situation. You didn't need fur or feathers. You didn't need an army or weapons. You didn't need the Canaanite gods with their rituals, temples, idols and sacrifices to get protection and help. All those things were totally unnecessary.

In God's presence you were totally free to simply trust him. You could be **arummim**, totally naked without a care in the world. And God gave Israel a really good taste of that in the desert, where their every need was taken care of, so that they **knew** what God's presence was like.

And didn't God do that for us too? In **Hebrews 10:32** the author has a lovely reminder that not only fits in exactly with the reason Genesis was written for Israel, it also fits in with why Genesis was written for us too, when he writes: "Remember those early days after you received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering."

Ah, those early days, when we were suddenly thrown into a hostile and nastily crafty world that pulled out all the stops to shame and embarrass us for our belief in God. Relatives scoffed at us. Friends ditched us. Work mates turned on us. Husbands and wives even left us. But it didn't matter, did it? It didn't matter that we were naked and vulnerable in a hostile world, **because God was with us**. We were naked but we "felt no shame." God wasn't an embarrassment, and it was the last thing on our minds to hide or conceal our trust in him and what he taught. We were open, unashamed and free. For the first time in our lives we too experienced **arummim**, and it gave us the confidence and strength to trust him no matter what life threw at us.

But the **arums** were never far behind, were they? It may have been plain sailing for a while as we basked in the confidence that God's protective presence gave us. But along came serpents and Canaanites to test us too, to see if, as the author of Hebrews continues in **verses 35-36**, we'd "throw away our confidence," and not "persevere" in our trust and obedience. In other words, we'd lose our **arummim** and then feel awful shame for letting God down, just like Adam and Eve and Israel lost their **arummim** and felt shame when they let God down.

And what a shock to discover that God allows this to happen to us in the very same way he allowed it to happen to Adam and Eve and to Israel. And he does it because it's always been in his plan for all the rulers of his world **to have their turn in the ring with the serpent**, so we learn how chaos operates and how to beat it. Like Cain, we learn how to master the enemy, or chaos will return.

So how do we master the enemy? By realizing from Genesis that the **arums** are far too crafty for us. We will fail, therefore, just like Adam and Eve failed. But do we feel shame like they did? And that's important, because it's feeling shame that affects our **arummim** relationship with God. But Jesus took all our failings and all our embarrassment and shame on himself. He died, in other words, to maintain our **arummim**, so we always feel utterly safe in our relationship with God, and that's how we master the enemy and keep chaos at bay. We keep chaos at bay by feeling no shame being naked and needy in God's presence, which is exactly what Israel needed to know as they encountered the chaos of Canaan.