

EVE TO SNAKE: 'SORRY, I'M ON A DIET.'

I started thinking a few weeks ago about the idea of sin. Fitting, considering that on the holiday of Yom Kippur, Jews apologize for sins committed by our individual selves and on behalf of the larger Jewish community.

Today is Love Your Body Day, another holiday. LYBD is sponsored by National Organization of Women and celebrated across the nation. On its website, NOW writes:



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*Dude, Where's
My Karma*

"Women and girls spend billions of dollars every year on cosmetics, fashion, magazines and diet aids. These industries can't use negative images to sell their products without our assistance.

Together, we can fight back."

Yom Kippur and Love Your Body Day both provide opportunities to actually do what we should be doing every day: pondering our actions and pondering our bodies, respectively. As far as I know, these two holidays have never historically been linked together. They should be. While Yom Kippur obliges its observers to reflect on their past actions in the context of how they have treated others, Love Your Body Day turns this reflection inward and encourages us to think about how we have treated our selves.

For some reason, though, Yom Kippur has gotten more press.

On Love Your Body Day we reflect on the objectification of women via the 2,000 media images we view on average per day, which is not new or necessarily sensational anymore. And objectification of men is not new either. It is not only women that society has an idealized image of—nowhere near. I've chosen to focus on women's body image simply because it is the subject with which I have first-hand experience.

Women have historically been painted through their positions, clothing, and expression as inferior to men, and childish: the worst ads arguably project the image of a woman's complicity in a violent situation. Oh, and that's when we appear as a full person, not as a dismembered ass or breast or head.

Though it's not new anymore, I still would bet that some of the ways and some of the explicitness of this objectification would shock the average Joanne Six-Pack. This objectification takes place in ads that one might rationally assume have nothing to do with body image to begin with. How about the vintage ad for a Pitney Bowes postage meter asking "Is it always illegal to KILL a woman?" How about Maker's Mark bourbon, which ran a series of ads frantically lamenting "Your bourbon has a great body and fine character. I wish the same could be said for my girlfriend."

Even products that are inherently healthy have propagated unhealthy standards for women, like the 1950s ad for Pep vitamins with a satisfied man exclaiming "so the harder a wife works, the cuter she looks!" And these are only advertisements with text accompaniments. Most ads don't even need text. The female model, looking as though she is addicted to heroin and has never eaten in her life but still very much wants to have sex with me, ironically speaks for herself in her silence.

Back to the idea of sins, though. We certainly cannot censor advertisers for portraying us as someone else's disposable toy. To me, these advertisers sin against human progress, against human potentiality for a more equitable society. But we, too, sin in our complicity.

Just as the "original sin" represents a fall of "man" kind by virtue of an individual action, so we as women and men — all over the world — are obligated to reverse this process. We can bring about, through our own individual actions, a different vision of who we are and what we stand for.

I'm not blaming the Egyptian woman whom I observed with my very eyes in Cairo last semester purchasing skin-whitening cream (<http://www.fairandflawlesskin.com>, among innumerable others). I just wish that I had the courage (and the sufficient Arabic) to ask her: why? Whose standard of beauty is this? I certainly don't think it was a sin for my friend from high school to move out to Los Angeles and purchase new breasts.

However. If the idea of "sin" is meant to deter us from behavior which prevents us from being the best people we can be, an idea I'd personally like to ascribe to, we need to have a long conversation with ourselves. This conversation could include issues such as why we buy the things we do, why we doubt our natural bodies as much as we do, and why we make unhealthy choices with our bodies. And maybe that conversation will lend itself to apologies.

When we apologize to our bodies, we apologize to our larger body as women. We apologize for not stepping in as that friend made excuses not to eat, again. We apologize for not using a condom that time and suffering thereafter. We apologize for perpetuating cosmetic companies' falsified advertisements of ourselves (see Dove's "Evolution" ad on YouTube). We apologize for letting anyone else dictate what "beautiful" is.

Yom Kippur marked my spiritual new year, but Love Your Body Day, in many ways, marks my body's. Last year, on LYBD, my fellow Women's Resource Center companions gathered as this year's sex columnist and I shaved our heads. While it meant different things for both of us and feels minimizing to confine that experience to one sentence, I was constantly amazed at how a lack of hair on my head made me appreciate previously-unloved parts of my body.

And a final note about "original sin:" The "fall of man" was actually humankind's very first Love Your Body Day. What we would today call "bodily transgression" was, for Adam and Eve, primal fulfillment. It was a human search for knowledge, an act of resistance against a force dictating what they could and could not do with their bodies. Today, take some time to meditate on what it means to "love your body," on any combination of those terms. On what it means to love your body, what makes your body your own, and what defines a human "body" anyway. Take some time to eat society's forbidden fruit: question the forces which dictate what a body "should" look like. In the spirit of exploration, of resistance through and by virtue of that exploration, Happy Love Your Body Day, and Happy New (Body) Year. And let us say: A-women.

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DEMANDING A RE-BATE

We are less than three weeks away from Election Day. In the longest presidential campaign in American history, 15 primary candidates became two presidential hopefuls: Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. John McCain. At this point in time, a typical campaign analyst would presume both platforms would have been well articulated, challenged, and disseminated in the presidential debates. But this is not a typical cam-



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paign, and that does not seem to be the case. In the midst of bemused moderators and citizens it is important to ask, what have we learned from Obama and McCain in the debates?

The first presidential debate, held in September, did a fair job addressing the financial crisis and some issues in international politics. Under the umbrella of foreign policy and national security, the candidates focused primarily on the global financial system, energy efficiency, and the war in Iraq. The public's response was reasonably positive (as we so cleverly saw on the Audience Reaction Meter), but overall the candidates' responses were measured and

politically pointed. The second debate however, was painstakingly mundane. Both candidates resorted to rhetoric, statistics, and political banter to halfheartedly address the concerns of the American people. Once again, focusing almost entirely on the economy, the debate dissolved into a sheet of statistics as the questions yielded themselves to easy answers and easy escapes.

Throughout both debates, I found that the questions asked by the moderators and by the audience left something to be desired. Unrelenting inquiries concerning the economy and the environment served to reduce the upcoming election to two categories — financial security and energy dependency. I will not dispute the urgency of these issues. I will however, point out that not much has been said to get a clear picture of the issues from the debates. How many different ways can one ask, "How is the bailout going to help me? Who is responsible for this economic meltdown?" The questions in last week's debate were charged with frustration, and for good reason — Americans are in a tough position right now. But the answers we received did very little to quell such gripes. Instead, they promulgated specific agendas with canned answers.

Moreover, not only have the questions been overly limited to the current financial crisis, but also the candidates have continuously sidestepped the focus of the moderators' inquiries. Instead, they peddle the repetitive sound bytes of their specific agenda, no matter how off-track they may be. More often than not, Senators Obama and

McCain have acknowledged the moderator's question and then proceeded to answer something entirely different. Rather than providing direct answers to the posed inquiries, both Obama and McCain have used the debates as a forum to address the American public on issues at their discretion. Maybe the questions themselves have not been bad, but the answers have instead deviated from their proposed trajectory.

Yet beyond grievances behind which questions were asked, it is important to consider which questions were not asked. It is evident that voters are panicked about our financial system; however, in directing all animosity towards Wall Street the American public has mistakenly put all other policy matters on the back burner. Once this economic cycle comes out of its trough, we will again be faced with social issues at the crux of American politics. Our near-sightedness has allowed us to forgo questions like, how has Obama addressed Guantanamo Bay and human rights? What has McCain said recently on immigration? With Justice John Paul Stevens approaching retirement, whom will each candidate appoint to the Supreme Court and how will the appointment affect *Roe v. Wade*?

Understanding the weavings of the economy in this election is inherently different from voting wholly on the economic crisis. A few years down the line, this financial calamity will have been placated and order resumed. It is imperative to reconsider where these candidates stand on issues other than the economy and in which direction they would like to take America once our institutions have been restored.

It is possible this is nothing new. Perhaps

this is politics as usual. But if that is the case, what is the point of holding each debate? The American public is anxiously looking not at the candidates' solutions to the current crises, but also what they genuinely stand for.

In tonight's debate moderated by Bob Schieffer, the candidates will sit around the same table and discuss issues in domestic policy. It is inevitable that once again the economy will dominate the conversation, but I sincerely hope Schieffer will steer debate towards other social issues that weigh heavily on our lives so we may learn more about the Democratic and Republican platforms. "The time has come to be a little more specific," Schieffer told The Associated Press on Sunday. I hope he lives up to his word.

It has been argued that the debates can ultimately determine the votes. They helped John F. Kennedy to defeat Richard Nixon in 1960 and Ronald Reagan to oust Jimmy Carter in 1980. But I am not confident that in 2008 that will be the case. The 2008 election has certainly ushered in a new era of politics. Do our expectations of the debates need to be adjusted to this reality? I would rather see the candidates rise to the occasion and demonstrate a strong understanding of these broad and multidimensional issues. Instead of falling prey to political stereotypes, through these debates I would like to see a candidate rise up and truly be presidential.

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