

## CLOTHED NUDITY: THE ESOTERIC CULT OF PHILO

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Philo of Alexandria says that Nadab and Abihu were naked when they made their sacrifice, but on the other hand they were also clothed, since he insists that the garments in which they were borne out (Leviticus 10:4) were their own and did not belong to the carriers. This contradiction may be solved by further delving into the significance of nudity for Philo. For him nudity symbolizes direct and private communion with God outside institutionalized religion, and therefore it must be covered and hidden from the eyes of the multitude (in describing this matter Philo uses the vocabulary of Greek stadiums and theaters). The meaning of this clothed nudity is developed further in Philo's description of the high priest's entrance into the holy of holies; he enters naked although he is also clad (in four garments instead of the usual eight). In this case the meaning of clothed nudity could not be exactly the same as that mentioned above, since the priest is told precisely how to enter, in order to avoid the fate of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 16). However, it may be interpreted similarly: the tension between nakedness and clothing symbolizes the tension between established religion and individual mysticism. In discussing the nudity of Adam and Eve Philo again contradicts himself, now possibly to avoid revealing that his mystical ideal transcends both good and evil. Such concealment points to still another level at which Philo's clothed nudity should be interpreted, namely the esotericism ascribed by Philo to Scripture, and likewise the esoteric manner of Philo's own writing, which I have expounded in previous articles. In this respect Philo is comparable to other Jewish classics, especially the Zohar.