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Female Menstrual Uncleanness

15: 19-33

Female menstrual uncleanness DIG: Why is niddah not misogynistic? What does niddah have to do with the lunar cycle? How do modern day Jews practice niddah? What does Paul have to say about seasons of abstinence? What is the difference between niddah and zavah?

REFLECT: In what ways might these mitzvot concerning cleanliness relate to hygiene today? In what ways might they relate to worship attendance (compare Hebrews 9:10)? What do they teach about YHVH, His relationship to us, and the things that separate us from Him?



In this section, the Torah begins with the subject of a **woman's** normal menstruation and then, in reverse order of the men, proceeds to deal with abnormal discharges of blood. In **15:33**, the menstruating **woman** is called davah, meaning "infirm." **Beginning with the previous Torah portion and continuing with this one, we have been examining the concepts of being ritually clean and ritually unclean in terms of what they can teach us about two kingdoms: the kingdom of sin and death (to see link click [Bv](#) - The Test of Tsara'at), and the Kingdom of Life and Righteousness (see [Cg](#) - The Test of M'tsora).**

A. Normal female discharges (15:19-24): The concluding verse of the previous file (see [Cm](#) - Male Chronic Uncleanness) introduced **the woman** whose discharges now become

the subject of the remainder of the chapter. **The Niddah: If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she will be in her state of niddah for seven days.** The Torah refers to **her period of menstruation** and its resulting **uncleaness as niddah.** A **menstruating woman** is designated both **unclean** and **contaminating** for a minimum of **seven days** after the onset of **her period.** Even if **her menstrual flow** lasts for a few days, **she** is still regarded as **niddah** for the full **seven days.** **The bed she** lies on, the chair **she** sits on, the saddle **she** rides on and the clothes **she** wears all become **contaminated** as well. Those who touch those items **she** has **contaminated** are rendered **unclean** until immersing in the mikvah and washing their garments. At sunset on the day of their immersion they were deemed **clean.** After **the seven days** are complete, **she** would no longer be **contaminating,** but a requisite immersion to remove **her own uncleaness** was assumed.

Niddah for observant Jews today: It was probably the moral prohibition on engaging in sexual relations with **a woman** while **she** is **niddah** that preserved the practice of the mitzvot of **niddah** in modern Judaism. Since the separation has been practiced continually since Temple times, it has retained the ancient observances. In Jewish observance, the mitzvot of **niddah** separation are taken very seriously, but only in regard to contact between **husband** and **wife.** Little concern is afforded to **the niddah's** contact with others. There is no concern over questions of bus seats or park benches, and an unmarried **woman** practices neither separation nor immersion. Those are matters of **ritually clean** and **ritually unclean** which relate only to the Tabernacle. Yet the separation between **husband** and **wife** is still carefully observed. **Husband** and **wife** refrain from even casual contact like bumping into each other in the kitchen. The separation period is not completed until the **wife** undergoes immersion in the mikvah.

Seasons of Abstinence: The apostle **Paul** warns **husbands** and **wives** not to **deprive one another except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (First Corinthians 7:5).** According to this rule, we learn that the level and duration of separation must be determined by mutual consent. We also learn that the time of separation is an opportune time to commit to heightened prayer. Finally, Paul seems to warn us against unnecessary abstinence. Sound advice I think.²⁶⁴

Niddah and the lunar cycle: By highlighting the human menstrual cycle, the Torah points us to our synchronicity with the biblical calendar. As we observe the cycle of our bodies, we note our relationship to the cycle of the moon. Elsewhere in **Leviticus,** the Torah teaches us to mark out the seasons and days according to the moon's waxing and waning (see [Dw](#) -

God's Appointed Times). As we watch **the moon** grow to its fullness and recede until **it** vanishes from the sky, **it** teaches us important truths about **God's** rhythms and cycles. When **the moon** appears again, it is said to be "born again." It is a monthly reminder of our spiritual rebirth. Obviously, there are many important lessons to be learned and lived by following **the Festivals** of the biblical calendar, and it is the cycle of **the moon** which determines even the celebration of those **Festivals**. Just as **the New Moon** must be observed before **the Festivals** can be celebrated (**Numbers 10:10** and **28:14**), our spiritual rebirth must precede any of our ritual observances.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for your awesome gift of spiritual rebirth by uniting the one who loves **You** with **Yourself**. **Abide in Me, and I will abide in you. The branch cannot itself produce fruit, unless it abides on the vine. Likewise, you cannot produce fruit unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away like a branch and is dried up. Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned (John 15:4-6).***

***Your** gift of rebirth involves a covenant promise from both parties. Your gift of righteousness is not something that someone can grab or take at their own convenience. It is a gift that is to be received by agreeing to the covenant promise to love you always. Everyone gets excited by **God's** covenant promise to **love** and watch over **His** children; but people forget that a covenant must be followed by both parties or it becomes invalid. **Your** children are to **love You** back with all their heart, soul, and mind. **Yeshua said: You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.** It is a joy to please and thank **You** for **Your** gift of spiritual rebirth, by **lovingly** giving back to **You** our gift of **love** as seen by following **You** in all we say and do and think. We look forward to praising **You** throughout eternity! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen.*

The Torah points to an obvious connection between the monthly cycle of the moon and the monthly cycle of the human **body**. A **woman's body** is synchronized to the lunar month. Human beings are the only mammals synchronized to the lunar cycle. Deep lessons regarding life, death, birth, and spiritual rebirth (not to mention the sanctity of marriage) are wrapped up in the Torah's mitzvot of **niddah**. **God** has called women to live out the lunar month, in rhythm with the moon. A **woman's body** is uniquely tuned to **ADONAI's** calendar practicing a continual cycle of rebirth and recreation. Through the mitzvot of **niddah**, the Torah elevates the **woman's** monthly cycle from the level of the mundane and

profane to a level of spiritual truth and transformation. She becomes a reminder of our spiritual renewal.

Niddah before marriage: Remember, for those who choose to observe the mitzvot of **niddah** today, they are generally not observed except in regard to the relationship between **husband** and **wife**. Therefore, a **woman** does not immerse or concern herself with her ritual state until marriage. Typically, a **woman's** first immersion in the mikvah is the night before her marriage. The Jewish tradition of immersion in the mikvah applied to both bride and groom. Notice how **Paul** assumes that we are familiar with the custom of immersing before marriage in the following passage where he compares **the Messianic Community** to a bride washed and cleansed in preparation for the marriage **bed**. **As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf, in order to set it apart for God, making it clean through immersion in the mikveh, so to speak, in order to present the Messianic Community to himself as a bride to be proud of, without a spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without defect (Ephesians 5:25-27).**²⁶⁵

Menstruation and misogyny: The Torah designates a **menstruating woman** both **unclean** and **contaminating**. It is not uncommon for the modern reader to regard such mitzvot as distasteful relics from a more primitive and misogynistic form of our faith. Such mitzvot seem shame-based and sexist. But they are surely not.

The Torah designates a menstruating **woman** both **unclean** and **contaminating**. **Whoever touches her will be unclean until evening. Everything she lies on or sits on in her state of niddah will be unclean. Whoever touches her bed is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water; he will be unclean until evening. Whoever touches anything she sits on is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water; he will be unclean until evening. Whether he is on the bed or on something she sits on, when he touches it, he will be unclean until evening. If a man goes to bed with her, and her menstrual flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; and every bed he lies on will be unclean (15:19-24).**

It is not uncommon for the modern reader to regard such mitzvot as distasteful relics from a more primitive and misogynistic form of our faith. Such mitzvot seem shame-based and sexist. Surely, they are not. **Normal male discharges** (see [Cm - Male Chronic Uncleaness](#)) are just as **contaminating as the niddah**. If there is a sense of shame connected with these mitzvot, we must ask ourselves if this arises from the Torah, or does the Torah answer a natural sense of modesty and "shame" that is already present in human

beings? Anthropologists find purity mitzvot like this to be cross-cultural. They are as universal as the impulse to sacrifice animals. Most ancient religions make distinctions of **clean** and **unclean** on grounds similar, though not identical, to the Torah's. It would seem that we humans have an innate sense of **pure** and **impure**, shame and brazenness, modesty and immodesty. The Torah answers these very real human conditions with mitzvot that can elevate even the most base elements of our human experience to the level of godliness and mitzvot.

This is to suggest that some of these purity standards do not arise as a result of Torah, but they are universal truths about the human condition. Why should **God** be offended by menstruation? He is the One who made us. I am suggesting that some of these things, though foreign to Western culture, are universal human reflexes, such as the mitzvot of **emissions, niddah**, purity, virginity, childbirth, and so on. In our sanitized society of porcelain and disposable hygiene products, we are so far removed from our own humanness that we hardly know what the Torah is talking about. Through the commandments, the Torah elevates even the most base elements of the human condition to the level of godliness. It does so by taking a basic human state or function, wrapping it in a mitzvah and thereby raising it to the level of holiness. Thus, the Torah does not endorse misogyny, but it responds to the innate human reflexes (spiritual and physical) which feed misogynistic tendencies. By placing societal form around those reflexes, misogyny is in fact thwarted.²⁶⁶

B. Abnormal female discharges (15:25-30): If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days not during her period, or if her discharge lasts beyond the normal end of her period, then throughout the time she is having an unclean discharge she will be as when she is in niddah - she is unclean. She would be regarded as zavah. A woman with a zavah carries the same level of ritual uncleaness and contamination as a woman in her menstrual niddah. Every bed she lies on at any time while she is having her discharge will be for her like the bed she uses during her time of niddah; and everything she sits on will be unclean with uncleaness like that of her time of niddah. Whoever touches those things will be unclean; he is to wash his clothes and bathe himself in water; he will be unclean until evening (15:25-27).

If she has become free of her discharge, she is to count seven days; after that, she will be clean. On the eighth day, she is to take for herself two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. The priest is to offer the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering; thus the priest will make atonement for her before ADONAI on

account of her unclean discharge (15:28-30).

Like the mitzvot of **the niddah**, the mitzvot of **the zavah** are partially practiced by observant Jews today. Because the Torah specifies that **a woman with a zavah shall continue as though in her niddah impurity, she** is designated with the status of **niddah**. **She** is therefore forbidden from sexual relations until **she** has become **ritually clean** again. **She** cannot be regarded as **pure** until **seven days** after **her** last day of bleeding have elapsed.²⁶⁷ Because of our freedom in **Messiah** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Bm - The Weaker Brother or Sister**), today Messianic believers have the choice to observe these Torah mitzvot or not to observe them.

A. Conclusion (15:31-33): The purity codes conclude with a summary statement explaining their significance and importance. The Torah clearly relegates them to the realms of Tabernacle/Temple concern. An **Israelite** entering the Temple compound in a state of ritual impurity was trespassing on the sacred purity of **ADONAI's** Temple. Those who violated these mitzvot did so at the risk of their own lives. **In this way you will separate the people of Isra'el from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in a state of uncleanness for defiling my tabernacle which is there with them. Such is the mitzvah for the person who has a discharge; for the man who has a seminal emission that makes him unclean; for the woman in niddah during her menstrual period; for the person, man or woman, with a discharge; and for the man who has sexual relations with a woman who is unclean (15:31-33).**

Haftarah Tazria: M'tzora (Second Kings 7:20):
(see the commentary on Deuteronomy Af - Parashah)

War between **Aram (Syria)** and **Isra'el** threatened to destroy **God's people**. Four outcast lepers lead a life of quiet despair, and yet, they became survivors of their nation! Afflicted with **leprosy**, they suffered from a disease that eats away at the deeper layers of the skin. In **Yeshua's** time, **leprosy** killed its victims. **Josephus, the first-century Jewish/Roman historian, described m'tzoriam as basically dead people walking.** Figuring **they** will die from the war-imposed famine, **the four lepers** went to **the Aramean** camp to beg for food. However, **they** discovered the place abandoned, with great supplies of food and wealth left behind. **They** began to loot, but then **they** repented of **their** actions and reported the good news to **Isra'el**. In the ensuing rush for food, the king's cynical advisor gets trampled at **the gateway** – just as **Elisha** had foretold! **This is exactly what happened to him, because the people trampled him down in the gateway, so that he**

died (Second Kings 7:20).

B'rit Hadashah reading (Matthew 24:31):

Yeshua asked which was more important, the sacrifice or the altar. **He** clarified that the altar made the sacrifice holy, and not the reverse (**Matthew 23:19**)! But **Isra'el** had slain the prophets sent to call her back to the covenant - including **Zechariah**, last mentioned in the TaNaKh (**Second Chronicles 24:20**). Worst of all, **his blood** splattered, defiling the ground between **the bronze altar** and the Sanctuary (**Matthew 23:25; Chronicles 24:21-22; Genesis 4:10**). **Yeshua** knew **Zechariah's** dying words. **He** held the religious leaders of the Temple accountable for the redemption of all mankind - starting with **Abel**, the first martyr, and ending with **Zechariah**, the last martyr in the TaNaKh (**Matthew 23:36**). Jerusalem that stoned the prophets would be left desolate (**Matthew 23:37-38**)! Every last stone of the Temple must be thrown down! But **ADONAI** is still faithful. **He will send out his angels with a great shofar; and they will gather together His chosen people from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other (Matthew 24:31).**²⁶⁸