



THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF MENSTRUATION

Making Sense of Menstruation

Spring 2013

There is so much more to the menstrual cycle than the biology lesson given to explain it, in the same way that there is so much more to sex and childbirth than the mechanics.

The menstrual cycle is a **cycle to base your life around**, in fact your life is based around your menstrual cycle whether you realise it or not, whether you pay attention to it or not. And everyone who lives under the same roof is under the influence of the menstrual cycles of the women who live there.

So, why not pay attention?

So much more will make sense and you will make more sense to yourself!

Reclaiming Women's Blood Mysteries

With the introduction of drugs to suppress menstruation completely – “*Feel the same every day*” – is their catch cry, with the wide spread, almost epidemic use of The Pill and other hormonal contraception by our young women, with the Earth, the feminine, in crisis, now more than ever we must **seize our birthrite** and **know our bodies** and **reclaim** the ‘women's blood mysteries’.

There is magic inherent in the menstrual cycle. Each cycle provides a woman with the opportunity to understand and **read the messages** her body gives her for any specific healing she needs. Each cycle creates the opportunity for as much spiritual growth and personal development that she could want. All a woman has to do to connect with that potential is simply to **be with what is**, her cycle, happening over and over.

The distressing symptoms that so commonly surround a woman's menstrual cycle in our day are often due to women simply not being connected with their cycle and ignoring their body's **messages or symptoms**, messages there to indicate specific emotional, or physical needs or imbalances. Our menstrual symptoms are usually ‘wake up calls’ about the amount of toxins in our lives, whether that be in the food we eat, the company we keep, or the stress levels we create from our lifestyle.

Some Basic & Stunning Facts

Women's cycles are affected by the moon.

Before electricity, women **ovulated when the moon was full**, and **bled when the moon was dark**. The pineal gland in our brain sends messages to our ovary, by hormones, to release an egg based on the amount of light our brain senses in the night when we are asleep. At the point of most light in the night, the full moon, we are programmed to ovulate.

Women who live in the country are more likely to be in synch' with the moon, as are women living in primitive cultures. Ovulating at the full moon means we bleed at the dark of the moon, the time when the energy is more inwardly focused anyway. The average menstrual cycle is the same as the lunation cycle 28/29 days.

Modern life with the artificial light and constantly bright nights has disrupted our natural inclination to be **in synchrony** with the moon. The biological blueprint for our fertility cycle is very different to how it happens now. Imagine the disruption this creates. Not only are we meant to be synchronised with the moon phases, we are also meant to be synchronised with each other. Like we are sometimes.

Many women have no connection with the moon and no idea what particular phase it is in. When they begin the practice of regularly observing the moon, tracking its path across the sky, noticing its **waxing and waning**, often their cycle begins to synchronise with the moon phases. They ovulate with the full moon and bleed at the dark of the moon or the opposite, depending on their phase in life. And sometimes they change again, depending on external influences.

You can ovulate twice a month.

Each woman has the potential to ovulate a second time in her cycle when the phase of the moon is the same as it was when she was born. This is called the **Lunar Return Ovulation** and explains all those pregnancies that happen when women think they are not fertile. This second ovulation happens unless the birth lunar phase occurs at the same time as your normal cycle's ovulation, or you are fully breastfeeding (although that's not the case for everyone), pregnant or on The Pill.

It's easy to find out your birth lunar phase and so when you ovulate the second time each month. You just need to find out the phase of the moon on the day you were born. Many books have that info, such as an ephemeris and you can easily do the research online to find out.

The World's first Shamans were women.

Shamans are medicine women and men. In ancient cultures they were the healers who used their special talents to **access the hidden realms** to receive information to facilitate the **healing** process. They used trance and drumming to communicate and connect with nature to receive information.

It has been supposed that the Shaman was a man's role but in fact anthropologists and archeologists have discovered that **the first shamans were women.**

This is obvious when the tendencies of women at different times of their cycles for **prophetic dreams** and other worldly communications are considered.

The sanskrit word for menstruation and season are the same – ***ritu.***

The word root for menstruation ***mens***, is the same for moon, month and measurement.

The first measurement of time, the first calendar was based on the menstrual cycle.

The menstrual cycle is a cycle within a cycle.

The bigger cycle is the woman's life cycle, her life seasons, which are just like the Earth's seasons.

Spring – Maiden, Summer – Mother, Autumn – Maga, Winter – Crone.

Every cycle is the same as every other cycle, just different lengths. The cycle goes – **birth, growth, full bloom, harvest, decay, death, rebirth.**

The menstrual cycle is the same cycle. And it is also divided into four quarters like the Earth's seasons. Weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. If you have a cycle that is consistently longer or shorter than 28/29 days it's the **first half** of the cycle that is shortened or lengthened.

Provided that you are ovulating, the second half of the cycle is fixed and is always the same usually 13, 14 or 15 days. Each week of the fertility cycle is as different to the other weeks as the Earth's seasons are different to each other. It's the characteristics of each of these weeks that are the opportunities for the spiritual practice that I speak of.

Week One resembles the second half of **Winter** (as we bleed) and then **Spring** energy.

Week Two resembles the second half of **Spring** and the **first half of Summer**.

Week Three resembles the second half of **Summer** and the **first half of Autumn**,

and **Week Four** resembles the second half of **Autumn** and the **first half of Winter**.

Each week our inclinations, energy levels etc and the messages from our body are different. They speak of the physical situation of that point in the menstrual cycle and the related emotional situation.

So if you know where you are in your cycle you can much more easily '**go with the flow**' so to speak. You could even manage your life around it. Start new projects in the first and second week of your cycle. Express your creative urges when you have them. Have parties when you're ovulating, finish off things in your third week. Stay home, and be on retreat when you're bleeding.

You'll have a lot less strife in your third and fourth week if you know you will be retreating when your blood comes, you'll actually be looking forward to your blood coming, and be ready 'to let go'.

Emotional & Psychological Energies of The Cycle

Here's an outline of the emotional and psychological energies of the cycle, week by week that you are dealing with, or if you aren't consciously, give it a go. If you are aware of the specifics of the lunation cycle you will see the direct connection.

Week One

(Days 1-7): Death Rebirth Phase

Winter energy to start with – inwardly focused, quiet. On retreat or wishing you were, or creating situations in your life so people will leave you alone (for example fights).

Life review. Visions of how it might be this new cycle.

Letting go of ways or beliefs and attitudes that no longer serve – both metaphorically with your prayers and intentions and literally with your blood.

Then Spring energy, building as your blood stops flowing. A time for metaphorically planting seeds for the new cycle.

During bleeding:

"I feel quiet, inward."

"I don't want to be disturbed."

After bleeding:

"I feel soft, a bit vulnerable."

"I feel as if I'm peeking back out at the world."

"Here I come again."

Week Two

(Days 8-14): High Energy Creative Phase

Late Spring and Summer energy

Increasing physical, sexual and creative energy building to a peak at ovulation. Urgent creative feelings.

Heightened awareness of self and others.

More interested in physical appearance.

"I feel happy, excited, full of energy!"

"I can do anything!"

Week Three

(Days 15-21): Coming Down and Harvest Phase

Late Summer and Autumn energy. Post ovulatory descent – can be positive or negative, a sense of pride or failure.

May experience feelings of failure or elation depending on what you achieved from your creative peak in the few days after your egg has died unfertilised.

"I lost my chance."

"I feel useless."

"I am so awesome, look what I did!"

May feel relief or regret (at not being pregnant, literally and metaphorically).

Feelings of wanting to get rid of unnecessary things around you or in your life. Wanting change. Things or ways of being that are no longer working for you show up. This may be confronting or a relief or both. Depending on how long you've been ignoring these promptings will depend on how you react to them showing up again.

This happens to get your attention so you can let go of them in this and the next phase.

"Everything seems to be hard."

"Nothing feels like it's working."

"I've been so busy, I'm so glad I can rest now."

Week Four

(Days 22-28): Distillation and Clarity Phase

Late Autumn and Winter energy. Lessons from this cycle are available to be seen and felt. Either glad of the where you're at with your life or fed up (again). Feeling ready to let go and surrender or feeling frustrated and annoyed.

Less interested in everyone else, less available emotionally to others. Inwardly focused.

"Don't ask me to do anything, leave me alone."

"I get it now, I'm letting go of this and not taking into my next cycle."

And of course this all goes for the corresponding moon phases and the seasons as well. Understanding **the way of cycles** brings with it an awareness of **the flow of energy**, the wisdom in that flow and the opportunity to be in synchrony with that flow.

I believe, honouring her fertility cycle is a woman's **responsibility**. It is in fact one way she can participate, in helping to correct the imbalances that have been created through not honouring the feminine. An issue that we must address so that we can live harmoniously on our planet. Through **honouring your menstrual cycle**, you help heal the "wounded feminine" the symptoms of which ravage the Earth and most of her people. By honouring her cycle, a woman honours the feminine, the dark, the juicy, the mysterious, the feminine power of creativity, sexuality and our Mother Earth.

Symptoms Of The Menstrual Cycle, Or Rather Messages From Your Body.

I was talking to a young woman about her cycle, starting to lead into the flow of the energy in our cycles and how she could be with that to best suit her life and I asked her "Are you on the pill?" Yes, she was. She was 21 and had been on it for seven years because she had bad **period pain** at 14.

I suggested the concept that her body was giving her a message that she wasn't heeding, that maybe she needed to rest in bed with a hot water bottle. She said nothing had worked, her mother even needed to take the day off work to look after her. I didn't feel I had the license, so to speak, to take the conversation deeper, but if I did I would have asked her about what she needed to do at 14 to get her mother's attention, to get her **needs met**?

And I would suspect that her whole story would unravel and she would 'see' that what had been going on in her life regarding her needs being met or not, was manifesting through her cycle, her period pain. Instead of taking the opportunity to '**hear her body speak to her of her needs** – physical, emotional and spiritual needs, and any imbalances, she was subjected to the enforced regulation of The Pill. The fake version of a cycle, in fact when you're on The Pill, your body 'thinks' its pregnant. I've heard also that when you're on The Pill, your inbuilt pheromone radar system that checks out likely mates for their suitability ceases to work.

Charting Your Cycle

The different physical and associated emotional symptoms that you experience through your cycle, are your body, your Self alerting you to a particular need you have that requires meeting. If you **chart your cycle** you will see that the symptoms happen at different times that have different needs.

The crankiness, impatience or annoyance so infamously called Premenstrual Syndrome, that we may experience in the last two weeks of our cycle, is really more about the feelings you have because you are not flowing with what your body really wants you to do – that is slow down, withdraw from the busyness of the outside world and look after yourself, not everybody else.

In your premenstrual week you feel less interested in the outside world and desire quiet time to yourself. If this doesn't happen or isn't possible because of your living arrangements, you may become very edgy, easily upset and in a 'bad mood', this serves its purpose and usually drives others away from you anyway!

There's one sure way to get some space to yourself and that's have fights, so no one wants to be around you! Often times, the bad moods, so to speak, associated with the end of the cycle are due to the woman knowing that even though she'll be bleeding next week, and would really rather be having sometime to herself to do that, she will have to carry on regardless, looking after everybody else and not herself. If she knew at this time, that next week she was going to have 3 days to herself, to rest, read, write, draw, whatever, her '**moon**

lodge, **red tent time** she wouldn't be cranky, she'd be **looking forward** to it.

Letting Go of Old Patterns

The other thing that happens in the third and fourth week of the cycle is that everything that's not working in your life shows up. Like, ways you've been behaving in relationships, ways you've been meeting your needs, or not, old patterns, anything, everything. Its Nature's design that at this time, you notice **outmoded ways of being** so you can let them go with your blood and replace them with their evolution next cycle.

Each month when you bleed you can consciously **let go** of old ways, patterns and beliefs that no longer serve you. You can do this for yourself and also "for all your relations", **the collective feminine**. It's the contemplative and reflective energy of this phase of the cycle that facilitates this great opportunity, your inner autumn pruning, as it were.

Cramps at bleeding time are to get you to apply some heat to your belly or back, and to get you to withdraw, from the outside world, so you notice what you're feeling and thinking. You will hear **your inner wisdom** and have new ideas about how to do things differently for those outmoded ways you let it go of with your blood.

Listening To Your Inner Wisdom

When we bleed we are more tired and when we sleep, when we bleed we may dream more than usual and it is common to have **prophetic dreams** at that time. So that's why your body sends you messages of tiredness, so you will sleep more, and have those dreams.

When you emerge from your raw bleeding state, hopefully you will bring with you what you have learned from listening to your inner wisdom. In the tradition of the Native American People's Moonlodge, the community waited for the wisdom that the women returned with from their 'moontime' retreat. They would come back with information about when and where to move camp, about where the buffalo were etc. The community valued this highly and made their plans around it, they **honoured the wisdom of the feminine**.

Watch the cyclical nature of your libido, your sexual desire and your body awareness. Women usually experience increased libido around **ovulation** for the obvious reason that there's a chance they will **conceive**, and that's the case even if that's not their plan. They pay more attention to the clothes they wear and how they look, leading up to and during ovulation.

Sometimes women feel more sexual just before they bleed too. This is because their vulva and vagina is more filled with blood in that **fullness** we feel around our pelvic area, just before our blood flows. And because relative to the lower levels of oestrogen and progesterone at this time of the cycle, our testosterone level, responsible for many things including **libido**, is high.

The severity of symptoms you experience throughout your cycle will be a direct result of all the things that influence your state of health. What you eat, what you think and what you do with your body. Eating a good diet, and a regular exercise or yoga and meditation practise are the best things you can do to regulate your system and ensure it functions from a harmonious space rather than out of balance.

Ways To Honour The Menstrual Cycle

The flow of the energy through the cycle gives us the clues for how to honour it. It's a good idea to let the people you live with know if you are going to change the way you do things at your bleeding time. Their support will be important to the success of you implementing these life changes.

Week One

Retreat from the busyness of the world, even just for an evening.

Have a relaxing bath by candle light with essential oils. Try **geranium and rose**.

Create your 'moonlodge' or red tent, this is as much a state of mind as a physical space.

Wear particular clothes or jewellery when bleeding, red stones or appropriate **crystals**. This can also serve the purpose of notifying the people you live with that you're bleeding.

Suggestions from Cassarne, my crystal advisor:

Two crystals resonate with the bleeding time and the choice can be made depending on which the wearer is more drawn to.

Carnelian: this relates specific to the sacral chakra and our creative centre, it brings balance to the female sacred organs and empowers the feminine in its process.

Moonstone: provides a balancing healing energy, especially of the emotions which may be in a vulnerable and fragile space. It assists in the balance and awareness of our hormones in their "dance" through our cycle. It is also a lovely stone to wear when its one's bloodtime as it reminds us of our connection with the moon and all her & our rhythms. Moonstone reassures us when we are in retreat at this time.

Garnet could also be worn purely because of its deep blood red hue and its resonance to our physical experience at this time. Plus it keeps one grounded and strengthens the healing energy of the Earth with our heart.

Experiment with **dreaming** by asking particular questions of your dreams.

Invoke a particular **Goddess archetype** to be with you during your bloodtime, perhaps Maeve or Kali.

Draw or paint.

Meditate - with or without questions and perhaps focussed on what it is you will let go of with your blood this cycle.

Do gentle exercise such as walking in nature and consciously connecting with it.

Feed yourself well.

Use special linen at bloodtime, like red coloured!

Use red towels.

Be kind to yourself - go with your flow!

The bleeding phase of the cycle is as if a monthly enactment of a vision quest. On day 3 of your cycle, just like in a vision quest, do a meditation and ask for a vision. You will be gifted with a vision to inspire and fuel you for your next cycle, write about it, draw it and refer back to it.

Make **Blood Prayers** - collect your blood by soaking your pads, and return the blood to the Earth, in a ritual with your prayers and intentions for your next cycle and beyond. With your blood that you give, return to the earth, metaphorically attach the unwanted ways you want to let go of. The Earth transmutes everything that returns to her, your prayers for your new cycle are made new from that. Pour the blood on the garden, many women have a special blood rose to pour their blood around, and they grow so beautifully!

Put a 'dot' of your menstrual blood between your eyes, on your third eye, to invoke the potential visionary aspect inherent in the bloodtime. Your blood carries with it all your genetic information and your **ancestors genetic information**, so this practice could open your third eye to specific personal information and ancient knowledge. The third eye area is also the place of the pineal gland, referred to in ancient knowledge as the "**seat of the soul**", so this practice could well increase connection and communication with one's 'higher self'. This practice could be done at bed time with a special invocation to remember your dreams in the morning.

Once you've stopped bleeding, when you are ready, gently reintroduce yourself back into the world.

Week Two

Use your creative energy, make something (make your own pads).
Express your sexuality, beautify yourself, be indulgent.
Celebrate the energy of your ovulation (just like you would the full moon).
Dedicate your egg to something you wish to give the creative life force to.

Week Three

Celebrate what you have achieved, created, succeeded in this cycle and let go of what you haven't. Don't be hard on yourself.
Start to notice the things that aren't working in your life in readiness to let them go with your blood.
Don't start any new projects, rather finish things off.

Week Four

Be ready for your approaching bloodtime, adjust your plans around it.
Cook in preparation for your retreat time.
Make a pot of hearty soup that you can easily feed yourself and everyone else from during your bleeding time.
Slow down.
Start to imagine how you want your next cycle to go.

"The whole menstrual cycle is an alchemical process in itself, during which every woman who bleeds goes through a transformation inside herself. To menstruate means to live through a cyclical transmutation in which the past is shed and the new is embraced. Experiencing this transformation through conscious ritual awakens us to our connection with the cycles taking place all around us and to our relationship with all life."
Lara Owen - from "Her Blood is Gold"

Honour the Rites of Passage

Welcome your daughters to womanhood with an **honouring ceremony**, as little or as much as she will allow you! What happens around a rite of passage teaches you about what's expected of you in your new role. Think about what happened around your **menarche** - What did it teach you about being a woman? Maybe you want to reclaim and re-enact your menarche.

Honour and understand **peri-menopause and menopause** – it is a time of transformation, a labour of sorts with a **birth of a new you**.

Create a Women's circle and share together your experience of your cycle.

So, there you have it - the menstrual cycle is such a gift if you bring your awareness to it. It's that extra special thing about being a woman, not only can we create new life but **we can recreate ourselves anew each cycle**. And it's so important to get this, because this happens whatever the energy is, whatever thoughts and feelings you start your cycle with will be what sees you through that cycle, it will be the theme (just like at a new moon).

So if that's negative, like *yuk, here I am bleeding again, I'm so tired, what about me, I'm in pain* etc etc, then those thoughts are the **metaphoric seeds** you've planted at the start of the cycle that will grow, full bloom, harvest, decay, die and then be reborn again.

So make sure you spend time at the start of your cycle, and on the new moon, **setting your intentions** for the new cycle, planting the metaphoric seeds that will nurture and feed you as they grow to their fullness during your current menstrual cycle or as the lunation cycle takes its course.

So in closing I shall say again, there is so much transformational magic available to women through their cycles. Such opportunity.

And I'll leave you with a thought..

You know, if we, all the women, got it together with our prayers and intentions maybe even **resynchronise our cycles** with the moon and with each other - we could use this energy to **heal the planet**.

There are many references on the effects of the moon on our cycles. For further information read "*The Wise Wound*" by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove, particularly Chapter 4 and "*Lunaception*" by Louise Lacey, Chapter 6.

"*The Wise Wound*" by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove and "*The Woman in the Shaman's Body*" by Barbara Tedlock

(If you appreciated these thoughts, please [subscribe to my newsletter](#) – I'd love to stay in touch! xxx Jane)