The Value of Menstruation:
Positive Meanings of the Female Lived-Body Experience

Sarit Gayle Moas

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s degree from the Program for Higher Degrees in Gender Studies of the Interdisciplinary Unit, Bar-Ilan University

*This work is protected by copyright law.
Copyright © Sarit Gayle Moas 2010. All Rights Reserved.
This thesis was written under the supervision of Prof. Larissa Remennick of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and Dr. Hila Ha’elyon of the Program for Higher Degrees in Gender Studies of the Interdisciplinary Unit, Bar-Ilan University.
Acknowledgements

My thanks to the Creator and as the proposal was approved on my birthday, Alef Sivan, prior to Erev Shavuot, and as this thesis was accepted exactly one year later, may this first academic fruit be my offering to the Divine.

To all my teachers & parents in this world and beyond who have assisted me in remembering and becoming who I am. To the social networks, spiritual communities and sisterhoods that continue to sustain and inspire me.

To my supervisors, Professor Larissa Remennick for your flexibility, integrity and openness and to Dr. Hila Ha’elyon for your brilliant clairvoyance, enthusiasm and knowing how to empower me to work independently.

To Professor Tova Cohen & Rachel Hillel from the Gender Studies Program, for your assurance, focus and cheerful encouragement. To Professor Jenny Kein for your reading and judgment which provided useful input. Further appreciation goes out to Dr. Rivka Tuval-Mashiachi, Dr. Hila Ha’elyon, Professor Larissa Remennick, Dr. Tova Hartman and Dr. Ronit Ir-Shay –your classes academically strengthened and personally intrigued me to the extent of stimulating my research.

To Dr. Tami Razi and Dr. Michal Rom for your patience in creatively brainstorming with me at the protracted outset of this project. To Dr. Orna Sasson-Levy, Dr. Lyat Friedman and Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten for challenging me to the extent of improving my academic style. To Meir Roth and Dr. Shlomo Sela of the computer department, for improving the thesis format through useful help and computer training.

To Linda Joyce Moas; Ahuva Rosenblatt, Dr. Avraham Moskowitz, Dr. Michelle Garland, Amanda Wright and Dr. Orna-Rachel Weiner for your advice, proofreading and support. To my editor-in-chief, Reuven Goldfarb, for your professionalism, skills, patience, charm and our synchronized wavelength.

To my dear friend, Rachel Bushary, for your continuous guidance and strong embrace. And a most special thanks I extend to Henit Azuz-Farchan, my confidante, colleague & coach as well as to Shelly, Nili and Ofra on the school front. I thank Ran Smilovitch and Ronain Moas for believing in this project on the home front.

Although this project reflects an alternative view, I am grateful towards Rebbetzin Emuna Witt, HaMorah Leah Golomb, Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, Rabbi Haviva Ner-David, Rav Eran Bénisty & HaRav Israël Yitzhak Besançon, for your teachings, sharing & blessings.

To my academic mentor –Dr. Avi Elqayam and to Dr. Dalila Amir, Dr. Marianna Ruah-Midbar and Dr. Rivka Raviv, I thank you respectively, for a partnership in a committed quest of giving over the experience of truth, bringing the body back into the discourse, academizing spirituality and exploring niddah openly.

I extend my deepest gratitude by dedicating this work to all the amazing and authentic women who honor this lived-thesis endeavor by contributing to menstrual research, talking their walk as well as walking their talk through living out unique female wisdom.

Sarit Gayle Moas (Sarita):
sgmybs@hotmail.com; saritgayle@gmail.com 972-54-4899458; 972-3-5225138.
# Table of Contents

Abstract.

1. Introduction ................................................................. 1

2. Literature Review ................................................................. 5
   A: Menstruation in the Jewish Context .................................................. 5
   B: Menstruation in the Israeli Context .................................................. 12
   C: Feminist Reinterpretations of ‘Menstrual Purity’ .............................. 12
   D: Menstruation Models ..................................................................... 17

3. Research Design and Methodology .............................................. 20
   Research Paradigm ............................................................................ 20
   Research Objective ........................................................................... 20
   Research Questions ........................................................................... 21
   Research Tools ................................................................................ 21
   Study Population ............................................................................... 22
   Research Procedure .......................................................................... 23
   Interview Structure and Analysis ....................................................... 24
   Ethics ............................................................................................. 25

4. Research Findings ..................................................................... 26
   A: Table of Interviewees’ Characteristics ............................................ 26
   B: Body Awareness and Acceptance ................................................... 31
Achieving Body Awareness.................................................................................... 33
The Approach of ‘Naturality’ ................................................................................. 36
C: Non-limiting Body Practices and Attitudes ....................................................... 38
  Menstrual Experiences and Practices................................................................. 41
  Pre-menstrual Practices..................................................................................... 47
  Reappropriating Body Practices ....................................................................... 48
  Other Body-Related Behaviors ........................................................................ 50
  Implications of ‘Naturality’ on Fertility and Society ........................................... 56
D: Widening Space to Accommodate Changing Boundaries ............................. 59
  Implications of Institutionalizing Space ............................................................. 63
E: Redefining Menstruation and Reality ............................................................... 66
  Women’s Authenticity Revealed through Menstruation ................................. 70
  Holistic Parallelism of Spiritual Embodiment .................................................. 71
  Towards Solving the Conflict of Niddah .......................................................... 73
F: Personal Reflections ........................................................................................ 79
5. Discussion and Conclusions .......................................................................... 82
6. Summary and Future Research ...................................................................... 88
7. Appendixes ..................................................................................................... 91
   Appendix A: Candidate Screening Guide ....................................................... 91
   Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule .......................................... 92
8. Bibliography .................................................................................................... 93

Hebrew Abstract.
Abstract

This qualitative feminist study deals with experiences of a group of ‘menstrually aware’ women in Israel, who describe their attitudes and practices concerning their bodies, menstruation and conceptualization of niddah. This thesis is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 19 fertile Jewish-Israeli women who are ‘involved with their menstrual cycle’ and contributes to opening up the public discussion of menstruation in Israel. This phenomenological research investigates their perceptions of the natural cycle through a thematic analysis in light of menstrual models and their philosophical, sociological and theological sources. Theoretical aspects of existentialism, ‘lived-body’ and ‘embodiment’ theories, along with Biblical sources, were examined within a critical feminist framework. The hypothesis of this research is the existence of positive menstrual meanings and this thesis sets out to describe and characterize the menstrual phenomenon as a valuable event.

This research population is characterized by a body narrative of naturalness and body consciousness. The possibility of linking ‘positive force’ to the woman during her menstruation derives from self-acceptance of the body in all of its conditions. Such an experience is more accessible by adopting a body orientation that is related to spiritual, ecological and/or health concerns. Unique body practices strengthen the independence, efficiency and presence of women by respecting their changing boundaries. This process enables them to create a new conceptual world that redefines the menstrual experience, a world that is characterized by more positive and empowering feelings and deeper meanings. Thus, menstruation is a sublime lived-body experience which manifests as a blessing, an opportunity and a mirroring of the mind-body.

This study sees the abandoning of the use of disposable menstrual products and conventional contraceptives, in favor of alternative practices, as an expression of the preference to experience life, fertility and sexuality authentically and as a feminist act. This study suggests: making important needs of women more visible, educating and empowering women through their bodies, legislat ing and enforcing a ‘menstrual leave law’ and establishing a Jewish menarche ceremonial tradition. These suggestions can transform the relationship women have with their bodies from a sense of disconnection to a feeling of positive connectedness. This agenda offers ways in which society can become healthier, more sensitive, and respectful and connected to the importance of our need to be in tune with our selves. This change can also bestow greater value upon the niddah space of women. Finally, this research demonstrates that the niddah experience can be considered as a blood covenant with God and that a body-grounded women’s authenticity exists which is accessible by women, especially during menstruation.
1. Introduction

The menstruating body, its identity issues and emotional experiences, which affect women’s self-esteem, all raise important gender and feminist topics that a phenomenological research framework can reveal. This thesis examines such subjects through studying a specific population of women who, despite stigma, taboo and the norm, place a high value on their menstruation.

Normal menstruation is experienced on a regular basis by most women during a substantial part of their lives. This fact justifies menstrual research to examine the impact of this event upon women’s lives. Despite its relevancy, menstruation has been marginalized, devalued or overly-treated as a result of medicalization. These attitudes and this excessive treatment create negative social and psychological ramifications (Lorber, 2000). Common discourse ignores menstruation, in favor of socially expected performance and approved behavior or over-emphasizes the drawbacks of this natural process. Such attitudes cause women, in compliance with the social norm, to feel sick, seek medical attention or artificially suppress their normal biological symptoms or even their entire cycle. It is part of a feminist agenda to render this forbidden topic as suitable and worthy of public discussion because discourse influences reality and causes change.

Economic, political and overarching social structures shape the menstrual experience and it is the discipline of gender studies that exposes this shaping and its repercussions. The over-active modern mind numbs the objectified body, rendering the mind-body link less apparent. This numbness silences one’s bodily experiences since the social body constrains how the physical body is perceived (Douglas, 1982). In contrast, corporeal feminism charges the body and its experience with epistemic value and re-presents the embodied menstrual experience as an empowering, health-promoting event. This approach alters notions of self-loathing toward bodily functions that women internalize due to male domination (Antonelli, 1997: 281; Colebrook, 2000).

Besides socio-cultural influences, a person takes up choices in one’s own way, with an inner experience of being inside and outside simultaneously (Moi, 1999; Young,
Perception, thought and behavior seem to merge into the culturally inscribed and constructed body. Culturally and socially valid styles of public discourse tell us something about the body-social, but little about the body-self. Nevertheless, this body-self is the combined private, inside levels of discourse and perception (Ots, 1994: 133). Feminist body theoreticians challenge the dominant discourses that subordinate the female body to male perceptions, claiming that, fundamentally, conventional language is phallocentric. In line with their endeavor to return the body to theory and instill in it pro-activeness, the concept ‘lived-body’ provides a framework in which the female body and female-self can be expressed through a new language that is more accurate.

Voicing women is a feminist technique that asserts we don’t simply have bodies; rather we are bodies. This fundamental difference contributes to positive identity formation and its embodiment grounds reflective thought. This type of articulation requires us to write, speak and create from within our corporeal experience and not merely about women’s bodies (Minh-ha, 1989; De Vault, 1999; Hawson, 2004).

The living body that refers to its aspects of sensations and perceptions is the ‘lived-body.’ This conceptual category consciously examines human embodiment and subjectivity through an integrative approach which establishes our intimate relationship with ourselves and our environment (Leder, 1984). Formulating theories about the body from an inside (lived-body) point of reference, puts the mind back into the body through an embodied sociology (Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Young, 2005). By blending mind and body, emotion and reason, nature and culture, holistic embodiment grants meaning to feelings and bodily sensations which are an essential part of human existence. The lived-body connects body with identity and emotion, which together organize our social experience of negotiation, management and choice. The body is the external manifestation of the self (Shilling, 1993). The body is lived; a site of knowledge,
experience, action and intention -our existential basis of being-in-the-world as women (Bendelow & Williams, 1998; Nettleton & Watson, 1998; Howson, 2004; Young, 2005).

Embodiment, as a situation beyond sex and gender (Moi, 1999), is a methodological field defined by perceptual experience, mode of presence and engagement in the world (Csordas, 1994). This phenomenology enables the examination of how women experience and articulate their ‘lived-body’ and consciousness embedded within the body (Nettleton & Watson, 1998: 9). This examination challenges Cartesian dualism by defining social beings via a theory of human agency that takes the body into account (Shilling, 1993).

This study is on the lived-body experienced of 19 Jewish women in Israel and their grasp of their menstruation and niddah. This project follows feminist qualitative studies (Lorber, 2000; Martin, 2001; Ha’elyon, 2004; Brown, 2007) with focus placed on living in a menstruating body, touching upon some of its medical complications and rabbinical aspects. Injustices of gender and niddah fence-off women, placing them in a position which affects their quality of being-in-the-world, in terms of gender difference, power relations and social roles. Thus, this research about personal meanings of menstruation gives women the freedom and opportunity to reflect upon and voice their woman-centered accounts of its positive aspects; an approach which aids in reassessing social values (Young, 2005). The focus of this research is to reassess menstruation as a resource which has meaning beyond its biological purpose. This important topic includes making heard authentic women’s voices speaking about their own bodies.

However, patriarchal oppression of the social experience of femininity has led blood to be perceived as a pollutant whose effects must be contained; and considers anything that

---

1 Nowadays, niddah refers to Jewish purity laws, to menstruating women being culturally in an impure state and also to the niddah customs that often have no basis in the Bible’s code of holiness.
draws attention to menstruation as taboo (Douglas, 1966; Martin, 2001). This overarching judgment has caused women to internalize such notions, and, in response, a need has arisen to rescue menstruation from women’s consequent self-discrimination. To accomplish this, I draw on feminist existentialism exemplified by Simone de Beauvoir (1952: 309-10), who speculates: “a woman would retain her pride in her bleeding body if she were not to lose her pride in being human.”

---

2 Menstruation and the menstrual cycle are colloquially used by laywomen to refer to either the bleeding phase of the menses or to the entire cycle. Therefore, I chose to use these terms interchangeably.
2. Literature Review

The theoretical background of this research explores the context of Judaism and Israel to aid in understanding the situated lived-body experience of Jewish-Israeli menstruants. Commentaries and concepts associated with the Biblical source of niddah are deconstructed through feminist theorizations. Finally, various menstruation models are presented to show how this phenomenon can be conceptualized.

A: Menstruation in the Jewish Context

Niddah originates in the Bible and has been understood in different ways by Jews throughout the ages. By surveying some pre-modern understandings of menstrual impurity as well as recent feminist interpretations, rationale can be infused into the niddah observance of modern women. Niddah defines the status of women, it affects their identity and attitude towards their body and it is directly linked to their purity, holiness, sexuality, religiosity and more. Unorthodox religious beliefs or ideas, which oppose the established views of the Jewish religion, are at times necessary to surface the positive aspects of niddah. The ultra-religious observe halakhic niddah by rote and see the Written Law of niddah d'Oraita (Torah), the Oral Law passed down by the sages and niddah d'Rabbanan (rabbinical law) as equally unquestionable. Other types of ‘seriously involved’ Jews have a need to refine niddah body practices and perceptions by rereading the texts, reconsidering their changing context and by replacing some rabbinical additions with their own additions of renewal. These negotiations and adjustments are crucial in helping women take pride in their bodies, cycles and religion.

Menstrual blood temporarily alters the status of Jewish women which has a negative impact. This stigma is largely due to the restrictions imposed upon women by religious customs that are meshed with socio-cultural beliefs. However, reinterpretation of Biblical texts and niddah rituals are forms of resisting this denigrating gender stigma. Rabbinical (halakhic) laws regarding the uncertainties of niddah create extreme separation measures from one’s husband (harchakot) due to the Biblical prohibitions of
sexual relations (*isur arayot*). As a result, focus has been put primarily upon the halakhic regimen that follows the declared end of the menstrual bleeding (*hefsek tahara*) including a detailed ritual immersion (*mikveh*) after the count of seven more ‘clean days,’ to resume producing families and maintain them in purity. I believe such focus, unfortunately, ignores the spiritual and women-centered aspects of menstrual *niddah* that this thesis aims at revealing. Regardless of this point, the religious subtext is a discriminatory theology of purity which views menstruating women with disdain, is prejudiced and requires revision (Adler, 1993).

On one hand, it is properly asked how women can be empowered or find affirmation in religion that damns the central pillars of womanhood and being: their bodies and sexuality (Kien, 2000: 209). On the other hand, the qualitative research of Wasserfall (1999) shows how *niddah* has been a positive source of identity. For instance, menstrual hut seclusion provided a female space that enables women to create an essential relationship with their bodies and a socially sanctioned opportunity for women to reflect on their bleeding process, sexuality, corporeality and changing needs with menstrual traditions employed in order to continue to foster personal and gender empowerment.

*Niddah* in Jewish thought is based on how *tumah*, during the Temple Era, constituted part of the holiness and priestly codes.3 These codes restricted sexual relations under specific conditions and barred people from the Temple, who were in a certain state, respectively. The priestly code was only pertinent in that era but the holiness code continues to be relevant in Jewish life. *Niddah* is not gender biased since the priestly context (*Lev. XV. 19-33*) considered genital discharges of both sexes to cause contagious ritual impurity (Antonelli, 1997). However, since *niddah* was the only *tumah* that was

---

3 This term *tumah*, problematically translated as defiled or unclean, is about altered spiritual status that ritually shifts the person from being in a specifically pure state-of-life (*tahor*) into a process that requires change.
retained, this has caused women to be stigmatized.

Basically, “woman unclean for seven days from the beginning of the period” refers to the healthy discharge of menstruation and to niddah d’Oraita apartness which last for a total duration of seven days, after which the woman was deemed pure. Conversely, unhealthy genital emissions (zav) rendered anyone ritually impure, barring them from the Temple. In that time, impurity contracted by all genital discharges had the capacity to be passed on to people and objects. These abnormal emissions ended with an additional seven days counted, a ritual washing and sacrifices brought to atone for one’s moral impurity (Lev. XV. 30). This passage is from a medical-scientific chapter that deals with female seed/uterine blood (tazria) that is parallel to male semen. Seed impurity of both genders, in which the person who contracted zav equally contaminates, required bathing in a spring or running water (Meacham, 2009).

For medieval sages, menstruation was perceived as being harmful. Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed (3:47) connected tumah (ritual impurity) to what is physically disgusting, to filth and the evil inclination. He saw menstruation as poisonous, polluting and damaging to men and fetuses. On “And if a woman has an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be seven days in her separation.” (Lev. XV. 19) he comments: “Do not come near a woman when she is impure from [her] menstrual period as it needs seven days to be cleansed.” Many of the commandments, according to this philosophy were actually intended to wean Jews from inappropriate behavior (Antonelli, 1997: 35).

Spiritual impurity (tumat-niddah) is time to wait out and be separate. Nachmanides’ description grasps the menses as a natural cleansing of the surpluses of blood and he saw it as a source of physical and spiritual danger. On “Thou shalt not approach unto a woman to uncover her nakedness, as long as she is put apart for her uncleanliness.” (Lev. XVIII. 19), his comment is that the Torah forbids sexual relations with menstruating
women because they can not engender healthy offspring and that is why this blood is impure. This holiness context deals with moral tumah and warns about the punishment of such forbidden sexual relations: “both of them shall be cut off from among their people” (Lev. XX. 18). Nachmanides explains that the laws of sexual holiness classify the menstruant as taboo to the holy seed until she immerses to purify her mind and body and becomes completely clean. Rashi also approved the practices connected to the negative tumah ideology to prevent sexual transgression (Ner-David, 2005: 193).

Distancing customs (harchakot) of refraining from looking at, touching and excluding women are rabbinical fences to avoid forbidden sex, convey that women are dirty objects. This negatively impacts women’s sense of body and self-esteem.

Just as Nachmanides refers here to a multi-leveled mind-body cleanse, innovations of the rabbinic period included ritual purification through immersion, an assumption made about menstrual laws in the tannaitic sources, in which bathing was required of a menstruant to purify herself, similar to those who had contact with her.4 In the tannaitic era, the biblical waiting period of niddah was a week. Then, Rabbi Judah Hanasi placed all menstruants in the status of zavah. According to Rashi, this was initially limited to situations where doubt was involved and where the local population was not sufficiently learned. Amoraim (Rabbi Huna and Rabbi Zera in the Talmud) put all uterine bleeding in the category of zavah discharge. Modern women disapprove of having their normalcy demoted to something considered irregular (Ner-David, 2005; Meacham, 2009).

In Hassidic and Kabbalist thought, misogynist taboos and niddah observance maintain the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, separating them as a people with the

---

4 Most commentators call for the act of ritual bathing or immersion to mark the end of a woman’s period of impurity. However, Lev. XII does not explicitly prescribe immersion even for post-partum purification. Perhaps, immersing in live-waters recharges the woman and renders her back to a state of purity. This washing and/or waiting phase restores the life-force lost through menstrual discharge. This ceremonial act also consciously and physically changed one’s status through an immersion rite.
menstruant as the ultimate symbol of the other (Koren, 1999: 300). The way men perceived ‘the manner’ and ‘the way of women’ (Gen. XVIII. 11; Gen. XXXI. 35) in canonical comments made on religious and philosophical tractates attests to the fact that misogyny existed and continues to have an effect: “One shouldn’t look into a bleeding niddah’s eyes as this causes biblical scholars forgetfulness.” (Rabbi Pafo, Ya’alzu Hasidim); “Evil contained within its legitimate boundaries serves a benign function in the universe... there is no evil that doesn’t contain some good and there is nothing evil in its proper place.” (Gikatilla, Mystery of the Serpent) shows how laws and boundaries keep this force away from the Divine realm (Koren, 1999: 9).  

In the late Middle Ages, widely distributed books in Ashkenaz influenced Baraita de Niddah that contains earlier material which was not accepted as normative. Notions that a menstruant pollutes food and utensils, may not go to synagogue or bless on the Sabbath candles, entered legal works and affected behavior, especially amongst the less knowledgeable in rabbinical literature. Menstrual impurity took on mystical significance to protect the godhead and spiritualize the sexual reunion. Kabbalists saw menstruation as encouraging the evil forces (sitra ahra), or used it to describe cosmic rhythms. Today, with Temple Era tumah no longer applicable and without the ability to purify ourselves completely from many types of tumah, yet the language of defilement has been unnecessarily retained to apply to women. Ritual remnants led to instituted restrictions regarding praying and studying Torah after male seminal emissions prior to ritual immersion. The abeyance of this impurity (tumah), which did not contaminate chairs and beds even in Temple time, disadvantages women, made niddah more central.

---

5 From a women’s standpoint, when tired and self-absorbed in menstruation process, for women who desire to retreat the male gaze can be especially bothersome and intrusive at this time. Moreover, such gynophobia is odd because through women’s bodies and fertility cycles men are also produced.

6 Until today, superstitions and shallow understandings continue to affect how menstruation is perceived. By not studying the sources and their depths, the harmful stigma retains its pull on society.
and is rooted in patriarchal bias (Meacham, 2009).

Deciding which bloodstains are pure involves power and the authority of rabbis over women’s bodies, establishing hierarchical relations between the subject and object of knowledge (Fonrobert, 2000: 218). Niddah and zavah were conflated because of a custom (minhag) of pious women who counted seven days at any sight of blood the size of a mustard seed (BT Niddah 66a). This was extrapolated upon to require, according to niddah d’Rabbanan, the counting of seven days after the cessation of one’s period, after which immersion in a mikveh would follow. This rendered all women technically zavot and tameiot half the time and halakhically unmarried women, who are not permitted (!) to go to mikveh as tameiot all of the time. Forbidding women from approaching the uncontaminable Torah and other stringencies insinuate that women are not trusted to know their own bodies, are impure at all times and sick half the month (Adler, 1973; Antonelli, 1997; Sered, 2000; Ner-David, 2005). Today, the far less confusion between niddah and zavah leads observant couples to reject their conflation (Meacham, 2009).

Ner-David (2005) claims that “menstrual ritual impurity” (Lev. XVIII. 19) implies that niddah has tumah in its core and is the reason for the menstruant’s forbidden status. She sees that tumah plays a central role in the practice and conceptualization of niddah by halakhic authorities and lay-practitioners. This realization requires ideological and practical reinterpretations in ways that are positive for women and links tumah to how the observance of niddah rituals is experienced. For instance, immersion can be charged with not only sanctifying resuming sexual union (Adler, 1973), but also with cleansing.

---

7 This precedent validates contemporary customs to eventually become mainstream practices and traditions (Masoret Yisrael). Customs women took upon themselves (considered Dat Yehudit) along with Torah Judaism (Dat Moshe) exist on a continuum containing Jewish tradition, renewal and law.

8 This ritual impurity (tumah) calls for a person to remain apart (tamei) and distant (niddah).
one’s whole self by ritualizing the end of the bleeding period and receiving the
beginning of new opportunities. Ironically, rabbinical law increases women’s
immodesty and men’s promiscuity; menopausal or single women who feel a need to
immerse, may do so in the nude and on the sly outdoors. Alternately, they may choose
to reappropriate the mikveh by subversively attending these rabbinical institutions.
Some feel that the total immersion is spiritually invigorating in and of itself, while
others have a need to undergo meticulous preparations in order for the immersion to
‘kosher’ the woman and render her tamei status, tehora. This is awkward since the
scrutinizing attendant (baalanit) ‘gatekeeper’ of the mikveh (opened to married women
only at night) can be unwelcoming. And when one’s wife ‘is forbidden,’ beyond the
d’Oraita week of abstinence, some men even are tempted to resort to prostitutes.

When there are halakhic infertility issues or no perceived confusion between zavah and
niddah, a grassroots movement in Israel, including a growing number of Orthodox
Jews, has been returning to niddah d’Oraita. Hormones given to healthy women,
made sick by culture codes (Sered, 2000: 112), is a medical solution for a halakhic
problem that politically repairs what does not need to be fixed. Women are made sick
by the responsibility put on them by patriarchal institutions (the state, rabbis and
doctors) that define and control their bodies (Sered, 2000: 15). An alternate solution of
immersing d’Oraita for self-purification and again for family purity d’Rabbinan
(rabbinical law), for doubt of zavah, draws on Rabbeinu Tam (Tosafot on Shabbat 13b)
and the Rashi commentary (on BT Ketubot 61a) about the custom to immerse after the
basic core seven days and again after seven more clean days.

9 Folklore and Kabbalist myths warn that immersing without subsequent copulation causes women to be
in danger. Yet women who have a will to immerse find a way despite the system.
10 Personal communications with Rabbi H. Ner-David and with Rabbi E. Goldstein in July, 2009.
**B: Menstruation in the Israeli Context**

The discourse of religious Zionism expanded impurity from sacrificial rites to sexual prohibitions, by enlisting menstrual purification in the struggle over national boundaries and identity. This turned *niddah* observance into charging women with the responsibility for preserving the purity of the people, the land and the Torah, which politicized the body and *niddah* (Yanai & Rapaport, 1997).

Moreover, Israel has a pronatalist ideology in which the non-impregnated female body is under social pressure due to the political, historical, moral, religious and biblical imperative to (re)produce. Involuntary childlessness may be seen as a form of social deviance, since the Israeli-Jewish womb is expected to fulfill the national agenda (Berkovitch, 1997; Remennick, 2000; Ha’elyon, 2004). Following Ha’elyon’s account of the ordeals of infertility treatments and Remennick’s depiction of the infertility stigma of women, it is necessary to sensitize the medical representatives, inform women about the heavy price of treatments, but also find ways of ‘healthing’ their bodies before infertility occurs in the first place.

In Israel, women menstruate more frequently since the age of marriage has risen and pregnancy has been delayed, which reflects changes in reproductive health (Remennick, 2000). In addition, contraceptives are now halting menstruation altogether. Such facts further justify local research that establishes and accentuates the link between menstruation, women’s health and well being, lifestyle, fertility and her sense of being-in-the-world.

**C: Feminist Reinterpretations of ‘Menstrual Purity’**

There is a need to imbue *niddah* time and status with an authentically integrated meaning, in order to live out Jewish commitments with integrity (Fonrobert, 2000). To be able to internalize the texts literally, inwards into the body, to what they could have
meant, honors our immediate perceptions and leads to less estrangement from the texts (Kien, 2000: 213-221). For example, the Bible teaches that menstruation is “the time of her separation” (Lev XV. 25) therefore each woman can reflect upon what types of separation could spiritually support and benefit her and thereby lead to a more significant menstrual experience of niddah. This could become a type of meta-halakha, in which an observance is not only technically practiced, but also spiritualized by pouring into it rites and rituals.

Out of concern for a positive self-image of Jewish women, gender awareness is critical towards certain male interpretations of the Oral Law that ignore or undervalue subtle nuances which are important and more noticeable to women (Antonelli, 1997: 35). It appears not to be the observance, but rather the theological justification of the laws that some women find most problematic (Korte, 2000: 314). Tumah and niddah dichotomies need not be hierarchical and can refer to the degree of being open to receive and readiness to partake in sacred activity within a cycle of separateness and closeness.11 A woman is not tumah and neither is her blood. What is tumah is her situational (and not constitutional) spiritual status. Within these issues of faith, how rituals cleanse, purify, re-sanctify and re-integrate is through human intentionality and by Divine decree, which are beyond logical intellectual comprehension.

Blood in Judaism contains and is equated to spirit (nefesh). When blood is being released, emotions, thoughts and part of one’s self are also being released since these are all aspects of the nefesh. In Judaism, blood can not be consumed (Lev. III. 17) since life and spirit are in the blood. Blood universally signifies death and is understood to be a source of danger to the living (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1998); the loss of semen or menstrual blood represents death, and its discharge may be perceived as the death of

---

11 Personal communication with Rabbi E. Goldstein in July, 2009.
potential life (Milgrom, 1991: 941) since “The life of the flesh is in the blood.” (Lev. XVII. 11). This connection is made more cogent by the rabbinic euphemism for the uterus: ‘a grave’ (Koren, 1999: 56). The physical cleansing of the uterus and blood may trigger one’s intentionality to consciously purge stagnant memories, superannuated thoughts and emotions from other levels of the nefesh.

Within the patriarchal ritual context, circumcision, contrasted with the blood of birthing, reflects the differences between genders as well as interprets them. Women’s blood is contaminating and men’s blood has the power to create an eternal covenant. Blood symbolism in the context of bodily fluids sees niddah as devaluing the female in relation to the male (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990: 180). Rabbis replaced the fertility symbolism of the Bible with blood as a symbol of covenant in which women are covenanted only secondarily by virtue of their fathers and husbands (Hoffman, 1996: 135). However, with more and more women in positions of religious institutional life, it is the fertility symbolism of women’s natural blood, as opposed to men’s culturally let blood, which can be reinstated along with its positive meaning. As there is power in ritual interpretation of the niddah status, considering menstruation as ‘covenantal blood’ and the niddah system as a tool that increases awareness of the life-death cycle, the female biological rhythm empowers through separateness (Goldstein, 1998). Covenantal blood is the connection between God and the Jews, the cultural act of male ritual circumcision which marks one’s sons as Jews and the sign of belief that the covenant with God continues. Some modern covenant services exist also for daughters (Hoffman, 1996: 219-20). To paraphrase what Goldstein explained in our communication (July, 2010): if men have a brit of blood, women must. Politically, if women start thinking of their blood that way, it would spiritualize it. Choosing to say a blessing on first sensation/sight of blood is also very special. Reappropriation of symbol like this is very
revolutionary because you take what patriarchy has taken away and negated and turn it into something positive.

Beyond all of these scholars’ observations, I claim that ‘the menstruation of niddah’ through any form of niddah observance is part of women’s Biblical covenant. When we regard the natural menstrual act as niddah, changes in sexual behavior, social, spiritual and energetic orientation follow. Dam niddah (menstrual blood) becomes a monthly acknowledgement and a corporeal reminder of the connectedness of the covenant of the Jewish female body with God, imbuing into this time a deeper dimension of holiness.

God exhorts Israel to be holy and separate. “For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy...for I am holy.” (Lev. XI. 44). This exhortation connects holiness to being set apart through performing the Divine commandments. The tamei of niddah can be celebrated as a holy private time in which the menstruant desires and needs to be separated from the community in order to bond better within her own world.

Niddah means to wander and like for sacredness connotes withdrawal. Separation distinguishes the Jews from other peoples, the Sabbath from other days and menstruation from other times. As a cleansing, purifying agent with healing power, the menstrual flow is regarded with reverence as it signifies fertility and the substance upon which all life depends (Maccoby, 1999: 107-110). As a time of power in which women need time and space to neutralize themselves, and as a sign of women’s covenant, not unlike the blood of circumcision, tumah pushes away intimacy and provides more personal space, but: “We have lost the element of holiness and maintained only the negative element of taboo.” (Goldstein, 1998: 111-2). Modernity constantly negotiates with menstrual traditions through the refinement of Jewish ritual observance to find meaning and reconciliation with and within the text (Wasserfall, 1999; Ner-David, 2005).
Tumah, interpreted to refer to something that is not whole, not complete, blocked off from receiving light, has its own completeness and capacity to reveal light from within. Methods of resistance (including such creative reinterpretations) allow lives of health, strength and power (Sered, 2000: 170) to undermine the common taboo. Governing women’s bodies under an ambivalent pretense of ritual purity and immersion (mikveh) has been criticized as patriarchal (Hartman & Marmon, 2004). Therefore, valuing and rediscovering the source of strength, joy, expression of holiness and creative force in women’s biology, along with modern feminist spirituality that sanctifies life, can lead Jewish women to feel proud (Kien, 2000: 222).

Niddah could really be about why women are exempt from a time-bound mitzvot routine since each woman’s situation is dictated by her body’s monthly rhythm. Practices, texts and men’s grasp that seem humiliating, can be reasoned out by women. By explaining women’s objectification and reshaping rituals, women develop their own manner of expressing the spiritual meaning of their bodies (Korte, 2000: 325), just as the reappropriation of the mikveh is about power struggles over control of holy space (Meacham, 2009). For example, during the niddah time, bleeding heightens sensitivity, causing gazes or contact with masculine energy or the Torah to interfere with women’s powerful retreat and healing process. Beyond apologetics, phallocentric beliefs, chauvinistic myths and rabbinical accusations that presume that women are affected by the spirit of impurity and its assumed dangers, the psycho-spiritual meanings of ‘holistic niddah’ observance ultimately serve God and women. Tameh can symbolically be re-understood as a liminal space between being tahor and dynamically becoming tahor again. However, being located in such liminal periods of transition is perceived as polluting and dangerous by those in charge of maintaining the structure until they are reincorporated back into the social structure (Turner, 1969: 95).
**D: Menstruation Models**

Scriptural, rabbinic and Kabbalist models all give a masculine-oriented rationale to niddah practices. Mystically, the menstruating Shechina (female aspect of God) is paralleled as also needing to be separated from God’s holy aspects (Koren, 1999). This assumes that the niddah woman is lonely during her period, excluding the possibility that she may choose to be alone. In Kabbalist symbolism, the Shechina is in dark exile and man is the light that fills the vessel of woman and womb. The spiral of revelation, rectification and redemption incorporates times of exile when the Divine is hidden. The menstruating uterus is the ‘opening of a grave’ undergoing a process of ‘destruction, disintegration and death’ in which the destroyed potential departs before something new can be rebuilt.

The rabbinic model of menstruation leans on pseudo-scientific research which has attempted to show the existence of a menotoxin, how the menstrual discharge and the sloughing of the uterine lining rid the body of disease organisms and change the local acidity and immunity levels which allegedly affect what the menstruant contacts and make the ‘bleeding wound’ susceptible to infection. This model scares women into religious niddah observance avoid dangers of cervical cancer. But whether a menstruating women releases substances along with her monthly discharge and whether or not it is healthier to abide by traditional Judaism’s sexual regulations, this model is extremely family-centered (i.e., it excludes all unmarried women) and it is male-oriented. While it is assumed that this model would stress the fear and repercussions of transgression, medical reasoning is used as a justification.

The Western model, like its society, measures instant output and consists of several sub-models (for a more in-depth explanation see: Martin, 1987). Its production model considers menstruation simply as a failure to conceive new life. The chaos model
interprets the menses as inefficient and backward, in terms of human evolution, due to its inherent breakdown of boundaries. Menstruation as obsolete is a model that sees it as useless and unnecessary. This has coerced women into manipulating their bodies so not to ovulate or menstruate regularly. This decision is partially due to internalizing ‘period shame,’ which is instilled by the media and society. This bio-medical model invents gynecological conditions it then manipulates to alleviate natural bodily and regulatory behavioral shifts that it regards as pathological symptoms. This approach is reinforced through the medical discourse that sees the body as a site of pathology that Western medicine strives to regulate and through such socio-medical coinages as pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). This pathological category is then overly researched, but PMS is not a women’s disease; it is a social one (Lorber, 2000; Martin, 2001).

Gender hierarchies generate and reinforce beliefs in female corporeal inferiority, justifying the subordination of women which, in turn, makes women ill. Illness becomes a constitutive part of the cultural and corporeal experience of Israeli women with gender and culture constituting the grounds for individually experienced pathologies (Lorber, 2000: 102; Sered, 2000). The remedy is to promote health via corporeal empowerment.

The metaphors of factory and machine, used as an analogy for the human body, characterize the specialists’ discourse of Western culture pertaining to the reproductive organs (Martin, 2001; Birke in Ha’elyon, 2007). Menstruating women are alienated from their cycle since normalizing menstruation, making it ‘business as usual,’ is another form of oppressing menstruating bodies (Brumberg, 1997), even if it resists the medicalization of the female body that results from gynophobia (Gatens, 1992). When women do not speak about their bleeding for fear of exposing it, continuing to perform as men do, claiming a public face of normalcy due to disembodied norms, the outcome is feeling split subjectivity, defilement and out-of-control (Young, 2005).
The personal is the political. There are economic and political repercussions influencing how women deal with menstruation on the levels of gender and society. Each woman grasp of her changes affect her identity and being. Healthy menstruation can be subdued or utilized to discover the significance of its manifestations. There is not one reality, as inner and outer forces are in play (Gatens, 1992).

The holistic model sees the menses as part of a natural equilibrium. However, we have endlessly been conditioned to expect and assume that suffering during menses is normal (Worsley, 1990). Helping a woman understand what is wrong and supporting her to improve the situation by herself is to decrease the need for medical intervention. Alternative healing practices and remedies support the normal variations in women’s rhythms (Lorber, 2000) without labeling them with names such as PMS.

For the Eastern model, the body has the intellect, the heart and a life-radiating abdominal center that directs vital movement, enabling instinctual immediacy. This unified body takes into account all of the being’s energy centers and intelligences (Minh-ha, 1989: 262). Chinese medicine and yin-yang symbolism view the menstrual blood discharge like seminal ejaculation as a loss of energy and cultivating a strong and calm body allow the cognitive heart-mind to control the stigmatized emotional center (Chia & Chia, 1986; Ots, 1994: 119). The body is as a source of authority, knowledge and action that manages the mind and not the opposite.
3. Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative research design is flexible and evolves throughout the research process, reframing the research question, the sample selection, the analysis and the theory construction (Crabtree & Miller 1992; 233). This feminist study explores the menstrual event, described by women who are engaged in this process, by implementing a methodology of the body that explores their worlds.

Research Paradigm

By voicing the subjective menstrual realities of women, this personal yet neglected subject, freshly articulated, can empower women to understand themselves through putting their worlds into words. Wanting to get the lived-bodies into theory, Grosz (1994) and Marshall (1996) advocate corporeal feminism which couples a sociological perspective of body studies with a phenomenological approach that focuses on experience descriptions within a certain context. In line with Marshall’s encouragement, this study, of an ordinary state of the body and embodiment, offers possibilities of discovering the variety of corporeality we miss when looking at just extreme cases. Hidden knowledge anchored in research interpretation can expand the traditional limits of our comprehension of such a subject. Menstrual research on healthy menstrual experiences uncovers a part of the gynecological spectrum that is often overlooked. Stigma is a psycho-social corollary of conformity (Remennick, 2000) that this research’s sample of women resists and studying this phenomenon allows for a grounded-theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of how to reject the crippling, external, social definitions of menstruation and niddah.

Research Objective

The purpose of this study is to examine a specific spectrum of Jewish-Israeli women and their attitudes towards their menstruation from a feminist, phenomenological perspective. Understanding their lived-body experience brings its qualities and conditions to the surface, since the body is the permanent condition of experience and
the corporeity of consciousness includes intentionality of the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The rationale of this study is the need to explore the inner worlds and strategies of women who value their menstruation. Conceptualizing their embodied menstrual experience based on their transformational involvement with their cycle, has the capacity to unveil meaning, bases of positive force, value and forms of resistance.

**Research Questions**

In seeking to find out how we arrive at meaningful menstrual experiences, within the local context, I pose the following questions about this phenomenon and its basis: What are the experiences of women, who attribute special, positive, empowering traits to their menstruating lived-body and being by even making deliberate lifestyle changes to accommodate their menstrual cycles? Which conditions enable women to negotiate with the canonic menstrual discourse that suppresses their bodily experience? What knowledge and mechanisms do women implement to cope with their menstruation?

**Research Tools**

Semi-structured interviews based on a battery of predetermined questions elicited reflections and feelings that exposed personal perspectives and data, systematically (Silverman, 1993). By listening to the subjective accounts of women, new layers of meaning attributed to women’s experiences surface (Ha’elyon, 2007: 23). This non-hierarchical conversational tool obtains interpretations that gather the inherent significance of respondent talk to generate theory, inductively (Kvale, 1996). The actual experience and language of women create theory through continuous revision based on reflexivity and the grounded analyses of their realities (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Techniques of restraint and writing up were part of the inquiry method, means of knowing, discovery and analysis that assisted in finding out about the topic as well as the self (Reinharz, 1992: 18-21; Richardson, 2003: 499-500). Active listening
and verification were accomplished through relaying back to the interviewees’ their
effect phrases. This strategy invited from them any further elaboration or refinement of
their accounts. Such studies on the quality of experience enable new themes to arise
which then raise new research questions (Denzin, 1970). This is why I was compelled to
return to the first couple of informants to carry out subsequent interviews or follow-up
questions via the internet, telephone or in person. By sharing with them the meanings
and essence of the phenomenon reached through the transcripts and other intake,
assessment of comprehensiveness, accuracy and verification through respondent
validation were enhanced (Silverman, 1993: 233).

**Study Population**

The scope of this research is limited to a sample of 19 Jewish-Israeli women of various
professions, ethnicities and degrees of religiosity who offer personal meanings of the
menstrual-\textit{niddah} experience created outside the conventional framework.\textsuperscript{12} They are
Israeli-born or Jewish immigrants living in Israel, located in a certain lifecycle stage of
womanhood. They describe themselves as healthy menstruating women and are within
the bracket of 26-46 years of age. They have a positive grasp of their Judaism and/or
body and are characterized by certain non-conventional practices and views. Women in
their early 20s or younger or early 50s or older were omitted because their lives, ideas
and menstrual experiences are influenced by other lifecycle stages. Women who out of
conviction reject \textit{all} established values and norms of society, expressing this stance
through extremely unconventional clothing, behavior or ‘blind faith’ were also
omitted from this study. All interviewees defined themselves as ‘involved’ and affected

\textsuperscript{12} A sufficient amount of informants were utilized until field saturation was reached. ~20 interviews falls
in the range of the amount required for a qualitative interview study to be published and is an appropriate
number of respondents according to the existing norm. The sample size tends to be between 6-20 subjects
in a qualitative study; but this is not the determinant of research significance since the major concern is
with information richness (Crabtree & Miller, 1992: 233).
by their cycle and either have spiritual interests, alternative practices or make deliberate lifestyle changes connected to their menstrual season. They practice yoga, meditative and creative arts, use reusable menstrual products, alternative therapies and/or see niddah as empowering in some way. Their lives are within the ‘broader mainstream’ of society but none of the women who eventually went into the sample currently use the Pill or an IUD. Informants were recruited at spiritual/cultural events, by approaching users of alternative menstrual products, consumers and instructors of alternative therapies and by referrals through internet, academic and social networks. Although each woman manages to locate value or positivity in her experience, either through her attitude towards Judaism or her body perception, they are widely positioned along the New Age continuum.

**Research Procedure**

The purpose of this current study is to focus on the centrality of the female body and its multi-tiered experience. It draws holistically on the body-identity-emotion prism to capture the complete corporeal reality experienced by informants through encouraging the elicitation of bodily sensations and images (Ha’elyon, 2004). This approach surfaces the implications of the changed spiritual status of Jewish menstruating women and its stigma. Meanings given to mood shifts, niddah and menstruation are in line with the ‘phenomenology of perception’ of being-in-the-world as women of these ‘body-subjects,’ immersed in their conscious experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Young, 2005).

Recruiting participants was done through peers, based on a specific selection of criteria and a prerequisite screening procedure which checked the suitability of the candidates (see: Appendix A). Each interview lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours long. They were digitally recorded and manually translated/summarized/transcribed by the researcher herself. The first three pilot interviews helped refine the interview guideline and were
subsequently re-interviewed according to the refined semi-structured interview schedule (see: Appendix B). Collecting and classifying the data, by organizing the most predominant ideas present in the narratives and menstrual stories, resulted in a thematic analysis. Data reduction was achieved by coding the interview database to illustrate its thematic properties. Emergent content categories and their concepts then formed conceptual categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). This method and this process enabled theory-creating patterns and typology formulations to emerge and overall conclusions about menstruation theory to be reached.

**Interview Structure and Analysis**

Socio-demographic details were filled in to inform the research on the thought processes and stances of women (see: Appendix A). Following ‘ice breaker’ questions, the inquiry and analysis were directed through the exploration of the implications of the empowering and silencing aspects of the event of menstruation, in light of its broader practices and issues (see: Appendix B). This interviewing method added to interviewees’ a sense of control and decreased their sense of alienation (Arksey & Knight, 1999). I avoided medical or stigma-associated clichés, euphemisms and vocabulary to obtain accounts in their own words. I refrained from hypothetical questions since the emphasis was put on existential experience.

The interviews were developed and administered to focus on past, present and future: The conditions and conditioning factors which influenced their menarche and menstrual experiences were sought out. Attention was given to the metaphors and body images chosen to describe the experiences and emotions connected to their current cycles and towards understanding their motivation behind their body-related practices. Future measures were recommended to suggest how to improve society and the overall menstrual experience. Based on the acquired database, the common denominators of the
body narratives were pinpointed and analyzed while naming the major themes that emerged from the interviews. This method was implemented to explain their menstrual phenomenon.

**Ethics**

Due to contextual sensitivity, open-ended questions were formulated in order for the informants to have leeway to respond in a way that seemed comfortable to them. The more sensitive questions (e.g., issues of abortion and income) were approached indirectly. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and it was stressed that all personal data given is confidential. To establish rapport and trust, reciprocal exchanges of information and some personal disclosure were provided. Interviews were conducted in a private, respectful atmosphere and all informants were asked permission to have their interview recorded. If problematic, notes were taken during and following the interview. Drawing on Becker, recording is not mandatory, since remembering ‘enough’ can bear sound and interesting sociology (De Vault, 1990: 106). Informants were invited to ask questions but data regarding researcher’s own background and views were only strategically disclosed so not to cause biased responses. Follow-up contact and sharing of research results were mentioned as being optional. First name aliases were given to interviewees by themselves or by the researcher. An effort was made not to disclose the identity of the informants by altering or omitting certain personal details that were insignificant to the research.
4. Research Findings

This section presents standpoint findings of this study’s sample based on their body narratives and culminates with a reflexive account. Their specific orientations reveal body attitudes directly reflected in their menstrual experience and in their general body practices. Giving meaning to physical and emotional changes contributes to their dynamic becoming and sense of an empowerment through embodied menstrual experience. In this section, quotes depicting the value and conditions of such menstruation and how this type of body and self are managed, will be presented within a thematic framework interwoven with theoretical interpretations.

### A: Table of Interviewees’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Age/Place of Birth/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Occupation &amp; Job Characteristics</th>
<th>Defined Degree of Religiosity &amp; Niddah Observance</th>
<th>Use of Menstrual &amp; Contraceptive Products &amp; Methods</th>
<th>Personal Practices &amp; Hobbies</th>
<th>Menstrual Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna 33 (English/Hebrew)</td>
<td>South Africa (7) Ashkenazi Tel Aviv</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Brother 29</td>
<td>MA Physics, Industrial Engineer &amp; Management Information Systems Coaching</td>
<td>Works in High-Tech. firm On-line marketing + College Mathematics Instructor (Full-time)</td>
<td>Secular Resist mother’s religiosity.</td>
<td>Labeled by doctor as having PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome) &amp; given the Pill. stopped Pill &amp; tampon use and now uses a menstrual cup.</td>
<td>Meditates through watchfulness.</td>
<td>Holistic belly-dance. Used TCM. Body-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamit 30 (English/Hebrew)</td>
<td>Ashkenazi Tel Aviv</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Had miscarriage 1 Child (from different relationship) Sister 37</td>
<td>MBA Biology &amp; Chemistry Studies FAM (self-taught)</td>
<td>Scientist Engineer Initiating internet start-up: “to provide freedom and flexibility I’d like.” Hi-tech. Sales, Tenders (High Work Intensity) Above</td>
<td>Secular “Prenuptial mikveh was spiritually elevating…if I had a partner tolerant of niddah, it’s something I’d practice but not something I’d fight for.”</td>
<td>After 10 years on the Pill, tampons and then pads: “I tend to think going on the Pill destroyed my life and finding FAM &amp; The Keeper was the best thing that happened to me.”</td>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>Treated PCOS with TCM. “My paid job is in software company, nobody counts motherhood.” Body &amp; research-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah 40 (English/USA (26) Ashkenazi Northern Kibbutz)</td>
<td>Married Had miscarriages 6 Children Sister 29 Brothers 42, 35</td>
<td>PhD Philosophy Ordained by an Orthodox Rabbi Writer Teacher</td>
<td>Non-denominational Rabbi Modern Jewish Marriage Consultant Freelance (Part-time) Below</td>
<td>Religious Post-categorization. Practicing Niddah d’Oraita &amp; mikveh by skinny-dipping with partner to mutually sanctifies sexual reunion. Doesn’t use contraceptives. Uses tampons. Bought menstrual cup. “Wrapping used products before discarding them is done out of shame and is a waste of paper.”</td>
<td>“I swim daily, it’s my sacred time.” Creates mikveh &amp; other rituals.</td>
<td>Had halakha infertility issues. Research &amp; spiritually-oriented.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name / Age</td>
<td>Language of Interview</td>
<td>Place of Birth (Immigration Age) / Ethnicity</td>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Courses &amp; Workshops</td>
<td>Occupation &amp; Job Characteristics (Work Intensity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina 30</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Ukraine (11)</td>
<td>Relationship (Lesbian)</td>
<td>Only Child</td>
<td>HA Sociology + Thesis</td>
<td>Formerly: Academic Researcher</td>
<td>Currently: Int'l MBA Program Coordinator + Reiki Practitioner (High Intensity) Average</td>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>“I pray when I feel, honor Sabbath, but don’t have a religious lifestyle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivka 40</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Persian-Iraqi Sephardic</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>HA Sociology + Thesis</td>
<td>Singer Composer</td>
<td>International Performing Artist Former Actress Freelance (Part-time) Below</td>
<td>Haredi background</td>
<td>“Very connected to religion in my own way; I believe in God &amp; observe at least 7 days Niddah.”</td>
<td>Only uses pads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella 44</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Petach-Tikva Iraqi</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>HA Sociology + Thesis</td>
<td>Took college courses in medicine, cinema, economics &amp; psychology</td>
<td>Gardener Make-up artist Florist Artist</td>
<td>Doesn’t Work</td>
<td>“I have an affinity to religion and love God.”</td>
<td>Naturally retreats before and during period from the outside world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/Age</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Place of Birth (Immigration Age)/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Courses &amp; Workshops</td>
<td>Occupation &amp; Job Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tzvia 39</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Tel-Aviv Polish Lived in the USA due to husband’s relocation. Jerusalem</td>
<td>Married 4 Children</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Trained abroad in soft martial arts &amp; acupuncture.</td>
<td>Formerly: Bank Economist in Financial Risk Management. Currently: Instructor of Women’s Chi- Kung. (Part-time) Below</td>
<td>”My religiosity isn’t formal but I have faith.” Practices niddah intuitively. Naturally refrains from sex until after her period is over.</td>
<td>Had IUD, now uses condoms. ”We have been conditioned not to trust the rhythm method.” Automatically empties out blood. Has short flow due to energy balancing practices.</td>
<td>Body-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigal 28</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Northern Moshav Syrian-Russian Haifa</td>
<td>Single Sisters 40, 38, 36 Brothers 33, 35, 39</td>
<td>BA Musicology student</td>
<td>Violinist</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>”Niddah empowers women by making them inaccessible sexually and lets women clean out their bodies.”</td>
<td>Uses Keeper. ”I never took pain killers because that would be on the account of something else.”</td>
<td>Vegetarian Quit smoking Used TCM for gynecological imbalances in the past. Health-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galya 46</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Be’er Sheva Spanish-Romanian Sephardic Hertziliya</td>
<td>Married Had miscarriages 2 Children</td>
<td>Teacher’s Certificate Tour guide Shiatsu Shamanism</td>
<td>Dula: Birth Coach Bodywork Practitioner Holistic Healer</td>
<td>Freelance (Part-Time) Below</td>
<td>”I’m connected to God’s laws and not the laws of mankind.” Doesn’t use contraceptives. Used Keeper for 10 years, now uses assorted pads. * Waters garden with blood.*</td>
<td>Vegetarian Artist Had infertility &amp; gynecological issues. Ecologically &amp; spiritually- oriented.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name /Age</td>
<td>Language of Interview</td>
<td>Place of Birth (Immigration Age) /Ethnicity</td>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Education Level</td>
<td>Courses &amp; Workshops</td>
<td>Occupation &amp; Job Characteristics (Work Intensity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina 36</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Holon Ashkenazi</td>
<td>Community near Beit Shemesh</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4 Children</td>
<td>44, 46, 50</td>
<td>Feldenkreiz</td>
<td>Permaculture</td>
<td>Holistic birth coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah 31</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>USA (17) Ashkenazi</td>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5 Children</td>
<td>Only Child</td>
<td>High-School Equivalency</td>
<td>Gynecology Office Manager</td>
<td>(Part-time) Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rona 45</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Ashkenazi Moshav in Sharon Area</td>
<td>Lived in the USA due to husband’s relocation.</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Had miscarriages</td>
<td>4 Children</td>
<td>BA Land of Israel Studies</td>
<td>Tour Guide</td>
<td>Instructor of women’s yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris 42</td>
<td>Hebrew and English</td>
<td>German-Polish Moshav in Sharon Area</td>
<td>Formerly lived in a village near Tiberius and in South Africa</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Had miscarriage</td>
<td>2 Sisters</td>
<td>Holistic Therapist of Integrative Bodywork</td>
<td>Alternative Medicine Therapist</td>
<td>Conducts consumer surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rita 28</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Sweden (2) Swedish-Iraqi Tel Aviv</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>1 Brother</td>
<td>1 Step-brother</td>
<td>BA Education Teacher’s certificate</td>
<td>Sexual Education Instructor</td>
<td>(Low-intensity) Below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/Language of Interview</td>
<td>Place of Birth (Immigration Age)/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Marital Status/Children/Siblings</td>
<td>Education Level/Courses &amp; Workshops</td>
<td>Occupation &amp; Job Characteristics (Work Intensity) Income Compared to Israeli Average</td>
<td>Defined Degree of Religiosity &amp; Niddah Observance</td>
<td>Use of Menstrual &amp; Contraceptive Products &amp; Methods</td>
<td>Personal Practices &amp; Hobbies</td>
<td>Menstrual Orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. **Menstrual Cup** is a reusable device made from natural rubber (The Keeper) or silicone. It collects blood internally and can be kept internally up to 10 hrs. As opposed to the tampon, it is not associated with Toxic Shock Syndrome, does not dry up the cervical canal, leave behind cancerous particles or change the pH level.

2. **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)** is a mind-body therapy that treats the origin of the symptoms and balances the body’s meridians, immune system and inner organs (including their corresponding emotions) through soft martial art forms (tai-chi and chi-kung), nutrition, acupuncture and herbs.

3. **Fertility Awareness Method (FAM)** combines charting changes in the basal body temperature, vaginal discharge viscosity and the internal cervical position, to know when the body is/ is not fertile.

4. **Niddah d’Oraita** is 7 days in the Torah. **Niddah d’Rabbanan (Halakha)** adds 7 ‘clean’ days and immersion, usually in a chlorinated mikveh monitored by a supervisor (balanit) who gazes upon and checks the naked body and interrogates the woman. Bathing outdoors in live waters, showering or doing sorts of ‘holistically intuitive’ niddah are suitable alternatives in the eyes of some women.

5. **Menstruation Awareness** is the holding or positioning of the body in a conscious manner in which menstrual blood is discharged at certain intervals, voluntarily. Similar to blowing a nose, urinating or defecating; sensitivity is acquired to monitor the release as needed from all of the body’s orifices.

6. **Organic pads** are disposables or cloth pads that are pre-rinsed in cold water before being washed out and last for years. Reusable pads, made of organic cotton, are ecological and healthy and do not contain bleaches, chemicals, nylon, deodorants or absorbent gels [*this research reveals the practice of soaking tampons/disposable pads before discarding them to pour menstrual blood back into the earth*].

For the findings of this table we can learn about the women’s orientation and background. Six interviewees have Sephardic or mixed ethnicity, the rest are Ashkenazi. Seven are immigrants, twelve were born in Israel. Four spiritual, three religious, four with ‘Jewish’ spiritual identity and five of the secular women are affected by niddah. Six have an average income, three earn above the norm, four are employed, seven have multiple jobs and seven are freelancers/self-employed. More than half have a low work-intensity. These factors indicate that less-structured schedules afford maneuverability to accommodate their cycle.
**B: Body Awareness and Acceptance**

Active listening to the ‘inner body’ cultivates watchfulness towards emotions and bodily sensations and establishes involved menstrual awareness. Trying to avoid polluting the body, heightens sensitivity to respect the earth. When the natural body is acknowledged, the environment becomes a conscious part of who we are, natural menstruation is appreciated and the female creativity cycle is respected. This apolitical, spiritual, holistic version of eco-feminism does not reduce women to be equated with nature. It is a non-essentialist model that explores the relationship between women and their inner and outer environments, values energy conservation and respects our natural resources, body and planet which sustain us.

The most predominant theme that runs through the body narratives of these women is bodily attentiveness. This theme, referring to the consciousness of the corporeal being that experiences information is articulated by a holistic body-worker: “Menstruation is the most fundamental connection to the fact that I am a woman. The blood is something basic...By opening up to it more and more, you don’t look at it from the outside anymore.”(Iris). Tsili, a psychologist, used to the stories of others, says:

I am very much affected by my menstrual stories; I pay attention to my menstruation, the waves of the month that influence me, beyond my sexual drive. How I sense my body is affected by the significance that there is a cycle and how I cope with it…I have always kept note of my periods, I am interested in researching into this further.

According to Brown (2007), establishing an accepting relationship with our body seems to be the pre-requisite for having a positive menstrual experience. Accepting and appreciating menstruation as part of the self, Iris experiences menstruation from within. Tsili, engaged in the phenomenology of menstruation, attempts to heighten her awareness towards this monthly event. Despite difficulty and drawbacks that arise, the choice is to go with the flow. Two single women add: “It's not fun, I want to rest which isn’t socially legitimate and menstrual feeling isn’t exactly the epitome of my womanhood.” (Gili); “The fact that I am aware doesn’t make it easier!” (Rita). These quotes indicate that whether they label their period as a symbol of womanhood or not, the women of this sample work with it, are happy ‘the body is doing its thing,’ and don’t deny or suppress it.

Ambivalence towards the body can motivate women to overcome its obstacles and opt to be involved with whatever it brings instead of being oblivious to it, as Anna relates:
“The period is part of me. It isn’t judged as being something positive or negative but rather it is perceived as something of value, I see it for what it is...To integrate and be at peace with my femininity in a manly goal-oriented environment is a challenge and a process.” This challenge is described by Mina, in other words:

During menstruation I see my body as a battle and feel stressed. I need to accept my womanliness in a more relaxed way, in its totality. I learned this from my menstruation which is a symbol of womanhood. If there are struggles it means something is incomplete.

Acceptance is a predominant part of this theme, common to New Age thought. To be present, the bleeding body is not regarded as a nuisance: “My blood is my blood, I don’t loathe it...By accepting the blood; I accept myself...blood is my essence.” (Lital). Another informant’s narrative depicts how intrinsic menstruation is to her being and how it is accepted with a warm monthly welcoming:

I always say when I get my period “welcome!” and feel physically and mentally clean when it arrives. It is painless. My mother viewed her period as dirty, my sister as painful, my girlfriends as annoying and my grandmother viewed it as a form of banishment. I feel at this time renewal and that is why this is a spiritual time for me. If I didn’t have my monthly period, I feel this cyclic renewal would be lacking. (Shiraz).

Through embracing and acceptance, the body and self are known. Peace of mind and body are accessible through yoga, meditation, breath-work and creative dance, which can lead to spiritual insights and the ability to eventually claim: “I feel comfortable and at ease with my body.”(Anna). With this sense of completion and equanimity, the body can be better managed:

I think one of my compensations for being lost on the spiritual or self level is that I am very, very connected to my body because it is real, it is just here...I am aware and take care of my body because this is something that I have found easier to control, as opposed to my non-tangible self. (Yamit).

In describing her body, Yamit’s descriptions support the linkage of existentialism and menstruation and the worth of examining body-related practices in addition to menstruation in this research. Here, consciousness arises through the phenomenological awareness of something that is the tangible foundation for the intangible self (Sartre, 1966). The body, be it through yoga, dance or menstruation, becomes the
Sartrean object of awareness through which existential consciousness is experienced. The body exists, is real and dealing with its tangibility breeds insight. Similarly, others emphasize the revelations of their bodily awareness too:

I had an amazing, spiritual experience through belly-dance. It totally opened up my body and pelvis area…it exploded out from the inside, not something you try to force or adapt from the outside. It was something that was so me that was able to find a way out. It opened a channel in which I could be more myself. (Iris).

In couple tai-chi, ‘pushing hands’ softens the ego and guards the center, I learned to be present and not let anyone lean on me. If you lean on someone you lose your center of power and control. This is experienced through the body. (Tzvia).

**Achieving Body Awareness**

Discovering oneself from within the body is accomplished through finding one’s authentic expression through body movements that are enjoyed and come naturally.

Having a constant awareness of the present-body’s changing needs raises the question of how body awareness develops and how women become aware of their menstruation:

“I was taught to ask questions and be inquisitive. I’m a bookworm, I’m a very powerful internet user and this is why I doubt [doctor’s advice]. This is your body. This is your life. It’s not just some thing…I need to have all the information.” (Yamit). Another woman explains what has contributed to her body awareness:

I was exposed to women, discourses on menstruation and websites on the moon and celebrating the cycle. This directed me to ‘listen in,’ to look at the moon and actually talk to it. I’d look to see if it is full and what is full in me; if it was waning, I’d ask myself what is missing in me…after some time, I became synchronized with the moon. (Dina).

When something is lacking or of concern, one looks harder, triggering a deeper connection with one’s inner world and body. Realizing that something is happening, the decision is to ally it. ‘Involved’ women tend to negotiate instead of obeying doctors’ orders especially after a bodily crisis such as a miscarriage, gynecological complication or difficulty in conceiving. Their intuitive resistance of medical diagnosis and treatment were often due to their suffering from side effects of the Pill or from having pain and yeast infections, they attribute to the use of commercial ‘feminine hygiene’ products.
These causes led them to alternative options and to be motivated to eventually endorse a feminist acceptance of themselves through observing and befriending their bodies.

Books have inspired several of the women to reclaim their bodies through internalizing images and adapting theories. Northrup’s *Women’s Bodies; Women’s Wisdom* (1994), Rona calls “a woman’s bible” and manuals such as *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1973) challenge medical culture and authority through enhancing personal autonomy and educating women. This is a means through which Yamit achieved “ownership” since women’s literature contributes to body awareness and is summed up by Mina: “Feminist consciousness is a category that I dislike but I will use it because the moment a woman defines that she has ‘a right to know’ what is going on, she looks to find sources of information.”

Late modern age is characterized by a highly attuned awareness of the self that invests in the body which envelops the self, since in a phenomenological sense; awareness and the body are intimately intertwined (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Hawson, 2004). Inner agency resists normative reality, builds identity through conscious reflexivity and formulates new alternatives. To be acquainted with one’s inner-self creates the capacity that can lead to inner agency: “When I am educated and aware I make choices; this information empowers me to act out of connectedness.”(Sigal). Being informed leads to conscious decisions and resourcefulness. Similarly, it is a choice to be authentic, to give meaning and choose what to believe as this empowers the person who takes such decisions.

Liberal feminists rejected equating women with nature and the body for fear of reducing the female beneath the male, associated with culture and the mind. Nevertheless, having the ability to be more bodily aware is a cognitive ability. By improving inner communication through awareness we can be more sensitive and accommodating individuals (Ortner, 1974; Tuana, 1983). This holds true also for the less apparent male
nature of men:

Men have a hormonal flux but don’t have menstruation to see it. It is an illusion to think it occurs just amongst women. Men have a cycle every four months with a down-time for different reasons, based on studies done on men… I discovered that the hormones manage us from beneath the surface and a woman needs to adapt herself. (Rona).

Western culture defines and labels healthy women as ill because of unpleasant feelings and symptoms during part of their cycle and encourages them to seek medical help for all menstrual conditions. Socially, this contaminates the status of womanhood with the expectation of regularly occurring illness and what supposedly makes females real women makes them unreliable workers, thinkers and leaders (Lorber, 2000: 55). Rona adds: “I work on other things at this time...if I have lots of meetings, advancing projects and am communicative during the month, at menstruation time I will summarize and understand them more, when I’m most intuitive. What’s wrong with that?” This shows an alternate way of being productive and efficient that is not robotic and routine but is cyclic.

Not taking anything for granted, self-inquiry keeps them in tune with the ‘lived-self.’

“My body is my temple; I am connected to it and observe it.” (Shiraz); “Listening to let the body talk” (Mina) leads to having with it an on-going dialogue: “You need to learn to listen to it; it’s not in the head, if you listen, the body requests.”(Rivka). Pain is also part of body language: “My body is speaking to me and the pain is the way. The minute I take a pill, I am cancelling that means of communication.” (Gili). To listen-in becomes an attribute of these women as Rona explains:

I dialogue with the uterus through meditations, images and visualizations… I conduct a dialogue regularly with my pelvis. I lie down in the female pose [soles joined and knees fall to the sides, laying hands on lower abdomen] before sleep. I pay attention to left, to right and to its center....Pelvis in Latin means to contain, it contains all the secrets of our life, our memories as women settle there, everything you experience and traumas we forget will all be present in the pelvis and from there it manages your life.

New awareness brought into deadened body areas enables the world to be experienced with greater aliveness, and reappropriation of the womb allows each body part to be infused with consciousness (Minh-ha, 1989: 262), allowing understandings to
Dialogue with the body achieves equilibrium since the body, and not the mind, is given the food, rest and specific exercise it requests.

Holistic discourses influence women to listen to their bodies, to be guided by their intuition and to have faith in their abilities as women (Britton, 1998). This cultivated ‘body agency’ voices one’s truth, questions medical authority, religious and social norms. Reacting out of negative force is the institutionalized conditioning that oppresses the body. Making conscious decisions on how to manage the body, which might entail certain costs or risks, is motivated from inner agency and positive force (Grosz, 1999). This power is the manifestation of possibility and active becoming, from which any unified identity emerges, since this becoming of qualities asserts positive force (Grosz, 1995: 215).

Negotiating with the canonic menstrual discourse is the demand, through positive force, of freedom and conditions that nurture the body, despite social expectations. Making adjustments in one’s schedule becomes a cost-effective investment that pays off in the end:

If I don’t rest or drink enough or if I work during menstruation, argue and get stormy, it will take from me power for the rest of the month. I need to watch out for myself in order for my menstruation to be good and I need to take care of myself during menstruation in order for the month to be good. (Sigal).

**The Approach of ‘Naturality’**

This outlook of naturalness sums up bodily awareness and acceptance since this worldview connects us to nature and nature-based choices. Modern civilization socially constructs and conditions our reality to carry out comfortable and productive lives that are less and less natural. Informants, dismayed by these social processes that work on us, have decided to stop buying into them. By going more and more ‘back to nature,’ they axiomatically consider all that is natural as good:
I don’t shove anything inside the body because during menstruation it is constantly making effort to rid itself so using tampons is out of the question….I took the Pill because of pain but it changes a lot of different things. I didn’t want to put chemicals in my body. I heard from gynecologists that there could be a connection between yeast infections and the Pill. This possibility was enough for me to stop. I read that the Pill changes the body odor which means that the smell I project to my partner and to all of creation will be different because I am swallowing that thing…that is poisoning. (Tsili).

It’s not logical…you can call it a pill and not medicine but… I am actually taking a drug daily and I don’t actually know what it is doing to me and my cycle isn’t even real. I was terribly scared to stop –afraid I would become very hairy and have pimples…My body went crazy when I stopped…emotions emerged that were suppressed; I didn’t know I was so self-contained. I am sure lots of physical symptoms that appeared, like acne on my back wanted to just clean out. My libido increased after my body cleaned up. I was then passionate because the act of suppression is emotional and also sexual. (Anna).

Seeing the body, metaphorically, as a container (Lakoff & Johnson; 1980) refers to what enters and exits it. Not wanting to disrupt the natural body odor or hormones that are released is also accomplished by avoiding the unnatural: “I don’t put on deodorant, it is not natural. If you eat healthy and naturally, sweat shouldn’t smell bad and there is no need to use deodorants that block the lymph nodes.” (Ella). The uterus is a container within the body-container that strives to rid itself whatever is pathogenic, old and no longer of use including what is introduced into her body through the male. This process is supported by intentionally lowering the body’s exposure to all unnatural substances.¹³ Forgoing the convenience and comfort that commercial products provide, symptoms that surface are seen as part of a necessary healing crisis and the body’s way of rebalancing itself.

Metaphors used in terms of how informants feel and what they experience offer a glimpse of their inner worlds (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Rona stresses the importance for all women to have “a balanced pelvis” and “to open the womb” for the energy to flow. Iris uses fluid, harmonious expressions of nature to describe her menstruation: “It’s like a flowing membranous dynamic in water, in a metamorphosis…that signifies my health and fertility and bathes my reproductive system and being.” Other informants also use

¹³ Use of tampons stop up the cleansing flow of the inner body and contain bleach by-products. The Pill has its benefits but it suppresses ovulation and its natural creative surge of energy (Chia & Chia, 1986).
natural elements in their descriptions: “It’s as if the earth is being irrigated and fertilized.” (Lee); “I see my body as a river of cleanliness that feels it’s being renewed.” (Sigal). The blood exiting the body functions as a natural cleanser. Such symbolic meanings of menstruation are important since women’s identity and body are emphasized in the discourse that disciplines the modern body (Brumberg, 1997). This ‘naturality’ becomes a body-grounded spirituality in which renewal and female authenticity are experienced.

C: Non-limiting Body Practices and Attitudes

The body is the corporeal context of the menstrual experience and body practices are the broader context of body awareness. Being consciousness and appreciative, women are involved in this changing dynamic. Their constellation of views and wider behavioral choices, regarding body-related practices that are not limited by what society expects, will now be explored to shed light on this population’s unique approach towards menstruation.

A feature of high modernity is the proliferation and diversification of knowledge from which it is possible to make informed choices about bodily regimens and praxes. This may offset the disciplining discourse of surveillance of the modern body (Giddens, 1991; Turner, 1993; Brumberg, 1997; Gooldin, 2002), allowing women to go beyond the limits of conventional practices that silence the body and the menstrual event.

According to the findings of the above table (see: section 4. A), the conditions of having an experience of ‘involved and valued menstruation’ sprout from the particular orientation of this population. This includes various measures of research, self-help, health, ecological, holistic and spiritual concerns, in line with Simchai’s (2005) observation that the way multiple ideas combine in the New Age is eclectic. Of this research’s sample, only four were influenced and supported by their mothers or sisters in acquiring the missing information that established their current views. The vast majority of women benefited more from sisterhood with their peers and reached their present consciousness on through their own self-experience. As Iris says, “My older sisters didn’t speak to me about anything. It is all self-knowledge.” Rita speaks about the
paradox of her liberal upbringing:

At home there was openness without many rules; it was as if everything was allowed
but they didn’t give me tools and didn’t speak about it. I didn’t know…what process I
was going through in my cycle and how it’s connected to my life. I needed in my
twenties to learn this and I realized that there is a big gap between this and the endless
information, so to speak, and the true insights of women, especially regarding their
body.

Research-orientation seems present especially in women with a higher education who
later invest in self-help courses and literature related to women’s health. Women who
use tampons, disposable pads, remove hair by laser therapy and are physically active
during their period, are in line with liberal feminism, in which knowledge is power.
They make informed decisions, demand gender equality and expect menstruation not to
be marginalized. They are relatively more competitive, have a higher work-intensity and
income, yet still see their menstruation as a positive sign of health. Inspired by
matriarchal and indigenous cultures through books [The Red Tent (Diamant, 1997),
Mutant Message Down Under (Morgan, 1991), books on the traditions of the Sioux
Indians, New Age books such as Her Blood is Gold (Owen, 1993) and Red Moon (Gray,
1994)], provide opportunities to reflect and uncover forgotten meanings. These
inquisitive women do what they can, are gentle with themselves and if disciplined, it is
only in specific fields based on their chosen agenda: “You pick one thing to do and drop
another…I can smoke and also do alternative medicine.” (Iris); “I could do more….I don’t
compost.” (Yamit); “I accept the fact that I smoke.” (Lital).

Self-cultivation through alternative mind-body modalities, contemplative appreciation
of nature and creative art expression through painting, music, poetry and other writing
are practices of those who have a spiritual orientation. Their desire to change is coupled
with a leniency since their priority is experiential spirituality: “The goal of everything in
life is to reach insights…I accept my body as it is although at the right time I will do
exercise.”(Shiraz).
Women who are more body-oriented explore their being through physical forms of movement and engage their senses by examining their blood and sharpening their awareness of the body’s changing smell and voice. For example:

During my period I feel the earth more because of the heavy grounding feeling and the pull of gravity. Then, lower sounds, really located there, can be sung in a low pitch to that area; reverberating with the uterus, the voice is naturally lower. It’s natural because energetically it is where you are. These sounds help to be in this place even more and know more about what’s going on. (Rivka).

For such women, bodily holism and awareness are prioritized over monetary success or urban achievement. They share the radical feminist belief that feminine nature and difference require lowering one’s pace and refraining from unhealthy or strenuous activities to honor the menstruating body.

For some women, menstruation has to do with their identity: “I will even take hormones in order not to stop menstruating which is so much a part of me.” (Shiraz). Anxious about menopause due to the need of prolonging the joy of bleeding, Rona is also concerned: “I have to start to look into it; I don’t know what I will do without it.” This is startling because it would be expected that these women would embrace menopause as a natural stage. They cling to menstruation since it is such an integral part of their being and womanhood.

For others, menstruation has to do with their body and health-orientation. Yoga and nutrition can be taken to the extreme but not during menstruation. Dentistry practices of replacing all fillings with white composite or gold, not owning a cellular phone, eating super-foods and raw foods and doing fasts, exemplify their pure-natural lives. “I don’t eat fish for fear of mercury seepage; I eat organic and quit smoking because it’s bad and is a sin.” (Sigal). Regardless of their financial conditions, they care for the body above all.

Located in the middle ground are eco-feminist women with a nature-orientation who lead semi-natural lives. Concerned with prevention, environment and ecology, they are
green consumers and their menstruation is a natural experience.

Body awareness, regardless of the woman’s individual orientation, overflows naturally into body practices which further increase that awareness. This axis of analysis that explores their body practices aids in understanding this population’s menstrual experiences because we are our choices and our perceptions directly influence and create our experiences.

**Menstrual Experiences and Practices**

It is practically a dissident act to abstain from conventional praxes and in their place practice, develop and adopt alternative menstrual praxes. By rejecting the fragmentation of the female body that manipulates the reproductive organs and suppresses fertility, their natural approach is as holistic as possible.

*Menstrual management strategies.* Well over half of the interviewees use an internal menstrual cup and/or cloth pads, three ‘voluntarily’ bleed; one woman uses cotton wool and some use organic disposable products. The practice of using reusable products and alternative methods are a liberating shift—not only from financial and feminist points of view, freeing women from a monthly expense/penalty and from dependency on ‘man-made’ products of capitalist corporations, but since these conventional products are dreaded: “Tampons are a punishment.” (Tzvia). “Pads are not fun” (Rita). Based on women’s accounts, pads irritate, tampons increase the blood flow and pain is a contracting way the body rejects these products. Conversely, women experience that a cup holds the vaginal canal in a relaxed manner and that reusable pads aid in having a less painful, more concentrated period. The meanings that are given and the experience and bodily condition that are affected by one’s choice of practice contribute to the identities constructed around menstruation:
A woman who is hyper-sensitive is usually very open, which means she needs some sort of protection on all levels because she is really a channel in which everything can enter and come out. So the Keeper was like a valve down below and it was in my control when I want to open this opening like a cap. When a cyst in my ovary and a fibroid in my uterus were found, I decided to leave opening open for there to be an energy flow [and switch back to pad use]. (Galya).

Conscious techniques of releasing blood out voluntarily may be done through speaking to the blood and to the uterus, through visualizations or done automatically and naturally:

I befriend the blood and encourage it to come out, it’s teamwork. In the bathroom, I say: “Okay, gang, I’m not going to be in here for another hour so if you want to come out, let’s go!” This is a type of visualization or cheering (laughs). It helps my mood and my connection to this whole story. I’ve come to realize that when I stand in a certain position, it comes out: I squat without [fully] squatting; yawn, stretch and separate my legs or put my feet on a stool [while sitting on the toilet seat] or I spread my buttocks and lean forward...I’m not afraid to go to the bathroom to see what I will find on my underwear. (Gili).

I become introverted and let it come out freely. I relate to myself with love. It’s important for me that menses don’t get stuck in anything inside, I prefer it to drip and I put a pad on and it flows out and if I’m in nature I give it to the earth, without pads. With yoga, I can hold it and release it out when I want. I can know exactly when it comes out according to the feeling. I don’t even need to put on a pad...I have awareness and with the help of yoga awareness, I feel it descending and with the muscle I can stop it a little and hold it in like ‘a Keeper’ and then let it out. I can lock it but not too much because it’s not good to pull it up again. (Ella).

The body may be socially constructed as being out of control by inferring that normal physiological processes violate norms of the civilized body and that its perceived breakdown embarrasses (Goffman, 1968). Performance, such as mastering the control of menstrual blood and consciously releasing it can be seen as subversive management practices.

Rest. Western society undervalues rest as unproductive leisure, loafing or idle procrastination, since the focus of meritocratic society is ‘to do’ in order to become:

We are a function of who we are in our being and not what we perform in our life; by watching, things start to happen as a side effect of ‘be-have-do’ and not ‘do-have-be’ …to do is to have and to have is to be in the West, but the truth is that to be is to have which leads to doing. (Anna).

Non-doing is not wasted time and can lead to action. To mentally and physically relax is to surrender into just being. And to be is the prerequisite to become. As a New Age
healer says: “Our essence is human being but most people forgot their essence and are human doing and sometimes concentration on doing is so big that people forget to be human.” (Galya).

Rest, as a major menstrual practice cures the ‘healthing-body’ and supports its process. Rest allots time, strength and space for a smoother, shorter blood flow from a body that relatively weakens from the monthly blood and energy loss. To retreat, decline invitations, cancel appointments, chooses solitude of self-initiated segregation (niddah) motivated by positive force. At times, trying to avoid chores, usual obligations and crowds, honors the body and allows women more benefit from their monthly Sabbath: “It is not a curse; it’s time to indulge, to pamper myself, to see a movie, take a taxi...” (Lee); “Rest and let the body do it’s work.” (Ella).

**Positioning the body.** Menstrual blood evacuation is facilitated by merely sitting erect or on a meditation bench, positioning feet on a stool beneath the toilet, vocalizing deep, low sounds and by doing simple yoga poses. These are proven techniques that achieve more efficient menstruation and better period management. For instance: “Sitting on a chair changes the angle of the uterus, groin and cervix.” (Lee); “If there is pain I move with it to find a releasing and comforting position.” (Gili); “Simple stretching poses ‘open up’ the body and increases body awareness of the insides which leads to self-connection.” (Galya).

**Bonding.** Experiencing the blood is part of the complete tantric experience of the menstruating lived-body. Women bond with their blood, body, environment and other women. Spiritual practices of bonding with the blood and earth include soaking used pads and giving this liquid to plants: “It is very natural and pleasant for me; I don’t have a problem with it.” (Iris); “This does grace to complete a circle; all comes from the earth and all returns to the earth and I return something to the earth.” (Gili). Also feeling clots and blood’s slippery consistency are a phase women go through to reclaim their body with awe. Iris adds: “There was a time I went through serious bonding, one step before sitting on the ground and letting it flow, I would touch, smell and put it in water and
swirl my hands in water...It was no longer something sterile from afar.” Authentically, these women involve all of their senses in this engagement. “We nourish the earth...my blood tells the plants through my DNA what I needs for them to nourish me back ...to wrap and throw away the pad is to hide it, not to respect and celebrate it.” (Galya).

We are what we eat and it is the food that builds our blood so alternately, this blood can be seen as a source of nourishment for the soil. How the insides merge with the outside influences the overall experience, especially when it is still considered part of the body. “I don’t throw out my blood; I honor it as a valuable part of the self. Bleeding is so intimate, it is so yours, it is so you... The inner comes out. This is the time I see my insides.” (Lee). Dina elaborates: “Something that comes out of me goes to a place and gives life to something else.” Through the soak water the blood returns back to the earth, to be absorbed and drained without being discarded into the garbage. The menstrual blood like the voice, breath, and odor is still part of the body image, even when separated in space from the body and retains the energy of the person and the value of its related body part (Schilder, 1978: 213) as described by Galya who firmly rejects the theory that menstrual blood is dead cells and tamei just because it is detached from the source of life: “When our voice is separate from us it isn’t dead and that’s the same thing. Blood is a potent part of us and should be honored and respected.”

Thus, detachable body parts have value as a body part even when they are separate from the body. The interplay between interiority and exteriority, the outside-in and inside-out (Grosz, 1994) are intertwined.

The lived-experience of this natural blood-letting is elaborated on by Sarah: “I love menstruation, the smell, it’s so gushy and everything...I am the most alive when I have my

---

14 There are mixed beliefs about the potency of this fluid; whether it nourishes plants and gardens or whether it needs to be buried or covered (Lev. XVII. 13-14) and treated with awe since life and spirit are in the blood but so are dead tissue and debris.
period, it’s like my body is doing exactly what is supposed to be doing; it’s doing its own thing.” Yet dread is experienced when there is a lack of regularity and when the monthly blood-letting is experienced as insufficient and scanty: “I am frustrated when it doesn’t flow out...For me, I don’t have a problem with it. I like my menstruation. In the last few months it started playing around which makes me uptight. It has become an issue in some way, to my dismay. I am looking for that natural place again.” (Iris). Descriptions of involved menstruation express appreciation of simply witnessing the female lived-body doing its job. All women do not loathe or see their period as a repeated hassle or want it to end.

Lifestyle. During menstruation, making lifestyle changes depends on the experiences of that month, the nature of each period and the woman’s changing condition. For health concerns, some abstain from dampness and even don’t enter public pools or jacuzzis, when the protective uterine lining is absent and the womb is more susceptible to germs: “I wouldn’t go into the water if I had my period.” (Shiraz). At this time, the spiritually-oriented seek solitude within their own ‘red tent’:

[During menses.]I avoid cold water and I don’t do yoga or inverted positions. I lessen activity because there is no power...Two days before I retreat and the first two days I rest. I prefer sometimes to isolate myself, it depends. One month like this and another like that. One month to retreat, next month to go out but to rest and let the body do its work. This is because one month there is more blood and the following there is less blood, like yin and yang. Some months I can go to the sea, it is according to how I feel. Sometimes, I don’t like to get wet at all and the next month I like to bathe. (Ella).

A qualitative technique that emerged from this study is to ‘bounce off’ an interviewee the beliefs of other interviewees to see what surfaces, pinpoint shared views and reveal elaborations and clarifications of emergent theories. Galya clarifies Ella’s understanding: “It’s possible to sense which ovary is ovulating or find this out through an ultrasound examination. And then know each month in which side ovulation is happening.”

This grounded-theory posits that there is one ovary of yin nature and one of yang nature explaining why a period may be experienced in the outdoors with more activity and why the following period may cause a need for a more quiet inner experience. This indicates
that ovulation’s alternate pattern also impacts the quality of menstruation.

The female lived-body experience is a wellspring of wisdom, and through heightened awareness women can ‘learn their bodies’ by picking up on subtle changes as Shiraz adds: “Released from me is a lot of gas before my period. I feel that my body is cleaning out physically this way, especially on the same day. Three hours later, I get my period.” Understanding the body, reflecting upon its symptoms, peculiar behaviors and bodily signals, women observe:

Two days before my period, my sweat smells stronger and I know I am going to get my period. The body is letting out a smell due to hormonal changes. It notifies me that I need to get my period. The body is simply changing to another state. (Ella).

The smell of sweat and blood changes, based on the amount we need to clean out of our bodies. I can sometimes pay attention to this or if I do spiritual work that purifies, the blood is then redder and cleaner. Menstrual clots indicate an internal condition of stagnation...and menstrual blood is type of mirror that reflects everything. (Galya).

All discharges from the body’s orifices, including all forms of passing wind, blood’s color, quantity and consistency and even perspiration are holistically observed as part of monthly detoxification and purification. It is also a diagnostic tool: “My menstruation is my traffic light for normalcy or problems within me.” (Yamit).

Giving and Revealing Meaning of Experience. By elevating this as a unique time of the month, menstruation is considered a blessing and an opportunity to benefit and undergo a multi-leveled cleanse that strengthens women: “During my period, I have a lot of insights, I feel spiritually elated. My period brings me wisdom and relaxation. When I am here and in the current moment, I receive Divine supreme happiness.” (Shiraz); “I withdraw, retreat and go inward during my menstruation. I feel weakness and blurriness which sometimes leads to a type of clarity, somehow, just like that.” (Rivka). Other practices and experiences of this time contain meaning and value:

It’s a gift, it triggers me to listen and be with myself. From something bad, something good comes...These are powerful days which need to be acknowledged...days to know myself; it’s a mirror of my month. It reflects and gives me an indication of how I manage. It is mixed with a lot of things. It’s a tool to know you. (Sigal).
We get something spiritual in the loss of [the] physical...[of the] blood. So we also get something from increased spirituality in the cleansing. *Niddah* is a place of spiritual elevation...Spiritual elevation happens. You just need to be there to tune into it when it happens. (Lital).

The value of menstruation is that it is connected to the sense of time the circularity of life and it releases excessive energies. .. I am a part of the cyclicity of all nature and that is how I relate to it. Just like there is a blessing for rain or dew in the right season...it is a pity there is no prayer for the period. (Rivka).

Positive breakthroughs of enlightenment and understanding occur when there is loss of matter with increased spirit. Fatigue and fogginess breed different forms of insight that potentially connect the menstruating woman to what is really going on and to what is required of her on her life’s course.

**Pre-menstrual Practices**

“I scrub my dry or wet skin before my period. It moves body and circulates the blood and invigorates it to come out. This happens naturally.” (Ella); “I vigorously clean my house before [my] period.” (Shiraz). These physically exerting activities, as well as exercise, walking a lot and balancing yoga positions are spontaneous practices that are descriptive and prescriptive of the period’s onset and make period have an easier flow. These practices move stagnant energy by releasing it physically and consciously: “In the days before, there is lack of being satiated and lack of knowing. Then something relaxes and everything opens, a type of grounding happens.” (Lee); “Before bleeding I have gnawing thoughts but during bleeding I am on-line. The first two days my thoughts are focused, the third day I am weak but on day three to five I am able to carry out tasks.” (Lital). These women are aware of their changing capabilities and go with the cyclic surges and slumps of energy they experience.

Pseudo-scientific jargon is used by this spiritual sample of modern women in their talk about how hormonal changes affect their physiology, emotions and health. Hyper-sensitivity to hair removal around menstruation, edgy emotional states prior to menstruation, the need to retreat and the physical libidinal urge at this time are seen as impulses which vent accumulated energies or are attributed to the changing hormonal levels. Although such accounts may be factually inaccurate in terms of biology, what is important is that these informants, sited within
a Jewish and Israeli context are actively inventing their own liberation by making sense of their subjective realities. Their emotions are explained with holistic acceptance and by legitimizing all of their feelings which are fully owned by them:

I am patient towards my impatience…If I had a hard month; the body cleanses and balances itself. I am more tolerant of strong mood swings because I know it is regulating what I have been through that month. My body balances that through cleaning out and flooding the emotions out. I feel it resynchronizes me back and resets me. I don’t control this; I let it because I know it is a rebalancing. (Iris).

In the past, I would say to myself: “Why did you get angry and make such a fuss out of it, you know it’s because of PMS?” But today, I say: “What do I need to be angry with myself for?” Also it exerts even more energy, by saying to myself that I wasn’t all right!….I don’t judge myself around my period. (Mina).

Pre-Menstrual Strength (PMS derived from women’s positive force) is the way women prepare for menstruation, cleaning their environment, moving stagnant energy and venting pent-up emotions. It is all seen as part of holistically preparing for menstruation:

“I am calibrated [sic], straight-forward, precise…I don’t see this as a disadvantage because even if I flaw, I learn also about my boundaries and the other person’s boundaries.” (Lital).

**Reappropriating Body Practices**

Dance and movement exercises from Asia and the Orient such as yoga, chi-kung and belly dance are popular practices in Israel. Locally, women’s yoga has been adapted to the female reproductive body to pay attention especially to areas that women’s physiology requires. Women’s chi-kung is done out of “inner beauty and well-being to balance the gender-specific emotional/energy centers of women” (Tzvia). Belly-dance is enjoyed as a feminine form of exercise that is revitalizing and liberating. Yoga and chi-kung, based on the male body and oriental dance that classically focuses on a male audience have been interpreted through a women’s centered approach. The female body also requests special gym work-outs: “Women need to do a different type of exercise than

---

15 Tai-chi and chi-kung are meditative movement forms which harmonize the meridians, strengthen the inner organs and empty out thoughts by means of concentrating on the sequence and sensation of these energetic exercises.
men. It is important specifically for women to strengthen the perineum, the pelvic floor and the inner organs of the abdomen to prevent uterine prolapse.” (Lee). Rona claims that besides also having their type of cycle, “for men there is also concern for prolapsed organs and the pelvic floor,” so perhaps men should be readapting practices that women have modified.

Feminist reclamation reowns and celebrates the female body through these therapeutic art forms. Discipline maintains a ‘healthy body’ for a life, productive on the outside and peaceful on the inside with the aim as not achieving an ‘aesthetic body’ based on the socially-constructed beauty myth but on the ‘natural body’ that balances between aesthetics and health, fertility and vitality. The ‘fertile body’ is glorified and its motive is to maintain that fertility at all costs (Gooldin, 2002; 127-8), also for this study’s sample.16 Israel is an extremely family-oriented country with focus put on pregnancy. This conditioning contributes to the popularity of maintenance exercises that cater to the fertile female body.

Mikveh and niddah have also been reappropriated by secular and spiritual women who practice and observe some form of these customs, laws and rituals. It is apparent that rabbinical law doesn’t have a monopoly over all women and their bodies. Women with various degrees of religiosity continue to find in immersion and in the niddah period, purpose and meaning.

Brown (2007) chose to explore the positive relationship women have with their menstruation, but analyzing the value of menstruation and exploring conscious ways of menstruating focus on its worthiness and reappropriate it as a developmental process. Such menstrual accounts correspond to theories of the lived-body (Csordas, 1994; 229-233).

---

16 Gooldin shows the anorexic body as a disciplined living-dead body that disciplines the body and listening to the mind. The female-lived body experiences regular menstruation in a glorified and celebrated way by disciplining the mind and listening to the body. Both bodies value when the body manifests fertility.
Williams & Bendelow, 1998); the living body that is existentially and phenomenologically experienced being-in-the-world, drawing on Heidegger, going through a process of dynamic becoming (Grosz: 1994; Young: 2005). The lived-body is experiential and existential as Sarah beams: “I like the feel of wiping it and seeing the tissue saturated, filled with red blood, really I like it a lot as it slides in, and everything feels so open.” Shiraz also voices with much enthusiasm: “Happy, spiritual, I pray in it and am in wonder from it. It takes me to another place, not of darkness; of light...I’m in love with menstruation. It’s like being in love with the feeling of spring.”

Expected to use tampons and keep up their outer productivity at full speed, most women use ‘pain killers’ and are disconnected from their bleeding sensations and menstruation is reduced to a nuisance. Nevertheless, women get back in tune with the process and experience conscious bleeding by reappropriating and reclaiming menstruation too.

**Other Body-Related Behaviors**

Body maintenance through grooming, hygiene, exercise and dietary managements have an aesthetic component that helps us present ourselves, create an identity for ourselves and even transform it into a commodity of sorts (Hawson, 2004). The Cartesian detachment of mind from body may easily lead to objectifying and manipulating the body in such ways, but ‘natural’ women, connected to their body and its intelligences, negotiate with the beauty myth by complying with only certain socially-expected beautifying practices.

_Hair Removal._ While the social norm that defines what is sexy and attractive calls for a hairless body and a groomed hairdo, some self-confident women do the opposite. They do what makes them feel good: “I don’t care what others think, I shaved my head bald!” (Shiraz); “It’s best not to remove [body hair] and be complete in some sense. Sometimes I can leave it and not shave. I don’t make a big deal about it.” (Mina). Conversely, finding
symbolic meaning in it helps women to comply to the norm: “Waxing is part of the cleaning process, part of the ceremony.” (Iris). For Lee “waxing is also something cyclic in which you remove dead skin cells. I like the feeling after waxing. During menstruation it’s more painful and not the time for this, you need strength at this time.” Lital had laser therapy done on her armpits and bikini line but waxes her own legs “since society causes women to undergo these procedures.” With regard to these social expectations, Anna states:

I don’t wax my upper lip or tweeze my eyebrows despite peer pressure. Women say to me at work that if I did, it would beautify my eyes…I resist facial hair removal but I’ve been socialized to want smooth hairless legs…I don’t feel like having that also in my set of what I have to do as a woman. This is just too much to change my face. It’s very artificial to me when your face is designed that isn’t beautiful according to ‘my rules of aesthetics.’

Deborah resists social pressure so as not to be taxed with endless beautification routines of ‘socially and culturally constructed’ women: “I don’t remove hair at all. My daughters say I should...It doesn’t even occur to me. It’s not a necessity and I don’t want to get into that. I also don’t wear nail polish. It’s just another thing to worry about. I feel totally fine with the way I am.” Believing simple is best and not in fake beauty, they ignore both the social stigma that silences menstruation and many consumer trends. At times, Ella cuts the hair off legs with scissors which conforms but in her unique way. Even if hair is removed in some way, they are aware of the pulls of society and refrain from doing this “during menstruation time when the body is more sensitive emotionally, psychologically and physically.” (Ella). This practice is still questioned health-wise and gender-wise: “I intuitively know it’s not healthy to remove body hair but I do it... Men are hairy!? ” (Lital).

**Body Weight and Exercise.** Overweight is associated with lack of self-control in Western culture which equates leanness with discipline (Turner, 1993). Women who resist this norm and are not lean may consider themselves as being in control and not having the social trends and stigmas control them. To be content is a process that is difficult to achieve in light of the media and mirrors that stress human flaws. Committed to learning to appreciate their bodies and selves, feeling ‘*bien-dans-sa-peau*’ is to
radiate one’s inner beauty: “Sometimes I weigh myself just as an indication...The experience is that the body is dynamic. Discipline in exercise is to feel the inner muscles and strengthen the pelvic area, but the media deals with woman’s external image.” (Lee). Rona also adds: “There is a high awareness in my family to exercise but we don’t have a scale.” Only when an idea ripens, change occurs, manifesting at the right time. Meanwhile, self-love and acceptance is prevalent regarding body weight and image: “Exercise should be done without reference to body weight. I am lucky that I am happy with my body...I know I am not skinny but that doesn’t bother me.”(Gili).

Body weight is a whole process of liking my body … my mother’s message was to hide my body and not to show it … It’s true for every point in my life until now that I love my body now more than ever before. It’s that kind of process. Like, I don’t think my hands are beautiful or something but they are kind of mine, my face I am learning to love, this is my body, just liking it the way it is. (Anna).

I gained weight and don’t like it. I want to return to the way I was, it’s more right for my body that way…but I look more feminine, it’s a mysterious joy to be rounded. On an extreme diet without carbohydrates, due to candida (that didn’t help), I lost weight but I got a poor memory, looked great but was a weakling. (Tsili).

Feeling good from within and making an effort to accept the body ‘as is’ do not conflict with feeling that there is room for improvement. Meanwhile, there is an effort to comport one’s lived-body with confidence, by wearing it with pride and by enjoying the experience of feeling relaxed in it. This holistic sense causes the ‘healthy body’ to be valued more than what Gooldin (2002) calls the ‘aesthetic body’ and is what motivates women to exercise and ‘balance’ their weight: “It is important to do certain exercises for the body. I am not referring to muscles or weight, but for energy to circulate in the body, for you to feel good and be happy with the body.” (Galya). Also Tzvia values the joyful experience of being present over the objective of muscle-toning:

Adam [husband] would say: “Go to tai chi and return happy.”…I drank from the cup of life and couldn’t turn back…[Through] concentration in the movement, I was there, as opposed to aerobics, where you can do the movements while you talk to friends and laugh without being here and now. That was the difference. That’s what excited me.

Diet and Nutrition. No one spoke about dieting or counting calories only about eating right: “Healthy balanced food is enough to provide 'naturally' what my body needs without
using supplements...There is no need to consume caffeine, because when I am tired, I rest.” (Tzvia). This approach is about nature’s providence and fueling the body qualitatively, but man’s abuse has manipulated the earth’s natural resources “In today’s world, the quality of food has become so low. Therefore, it is necessary to supplement even organic food with vitamins like C and B complex.” (Sigal). She adds: “I don’t receive anything from the food I eat outside. I am aware and eat plain, simple, organic food...not even with salt, which is most satisfying for me.” To show how women see their world, choices and nourishment as connected to the bigger picture, Sigal connects the harm of oral contraceptives to the water we drink: “The Pill isn’t something good...urination causes the hormones to return to the water system [from using the Pill] and then it in turn affects men’s health.....but to be realistic, like fast-food, people aren’t interested in using contraceptives that are more complicated.” Ella elaborates: “I only use mineral water because the hormones women take and the hormones and antibiotics that are given to animals poison our tap water.”

Diet is modified in accordance to the seasons as to one’s period: “Eating rice with turmeric relaxes the contractions and cramps and I drink more water to replenish fluids.” (Lee). On drinking steeped nettles and especially raspberry leaf tea, mentioned by several women: “this stuff is amazing and I tell all my women friends about it.”(Yamit). This tea is known to induce pregnancy by encouraging the uterus to contract effectively. If the onset of the period is scanty or intermittent and its end is protracted, the sour flavor aids in contracting out the final dregs. Turmeric also is astringent and anti-spasmodic in this sense. These women are their own doctors and are familiar with such natural remedies. They are less frequently sick since women who don’t consult doctors tend to report positive feelings (Lorber, 2000).

The body, and not the mind, tells us important information including when and what type of movement or food is required for its maintenance. It is a process of getting to know the changing needs of the body:
I help it to get to the places it asks to be in. Sometimes the body wants to, it feels like stretching. If it feels like being in water, I take it there. When I am in a good state, my body requests of me what it wants to eat and it tells me whatever it desires. (Rivka).

It’s true that what you put into your body is who you are [you are what you eat] and my whole way of eating and what I enjoy eating has changed…like my awareness of what I put in my stomach has changed through my healing process. Now, I watch what I eat and notice what my stomach enjoys…and how I nourish it. (Anna).

Drinking enough water or tea during menstruation is important since we have more bowel movements then. I feel a need to drink before or after bowel movements, this naturally replaces needed liquids to the body. I feel my body needs lots of liquids because it helps cleanse the body. (Sigal).

Iris values the ‘at-ease body’ the most, especially during menstruation: “I'll try to sleep more at this time. Occasionally I feel like having sweets, carbohydrates and meat. I try less to restrict myself at that time.” Whether having a physical regimen or reminiscing about the feeling of having had one, the embodied subjectivity patiently embraces the current body structure at every stage of its dynamic process of becoming.

Contraception and Abortion Views. The most important aim of the modern woman is to control her own body: choosing her partner, contraception method and when she wants to have children. Reproductive manipulation through chemical and hormonal technologies including birth control ‘medicines,’ IUDs and other quick-fix solutions, render women sexually accessible. The widespread trend favorably considered feminist that advances women’s liberation and sexual freedom, is the Pill. However, seeing the fertility cycle as requiring intervention, has somewhat detached the menses from the body-identity whole. Awareness shifts have led many women to stop using these methods and stop smoking after many years. Some turned to the natural fertility awareness method (FAM) and use a diaphragm or a cervical cap and condoms instead.

“Since I didn’t want to take chemical contraceptives, I learned FAM. So enthusiastic, I’d always check and write down the color [of discharge] and height [of cervix] and that would connect me to myself and cause me to listen-in on other levels.” (Dina). More extreme beliefs and solutions also exist: “Condoms are not healthy....I use running water for contraception.” (Ella). Body surveillance practices are characterized by disciplining the self; by taking
responsibility of one’s own fertility, health and ability to prevent or promote pregnancy through mastering one’s own body language (the changing consistency of vaginal secretions, body temperature, openness and the position of the cervix). Lee defies specialists through her acquired self-authority, vetoes the doctor’s opinion through knowing her body and its boundaries and copes with pain through self-generated body imagery: “Society implies we are sick and defiled during menses; I try to remind myself that I am healthy and fertile.”

After exploring the use of the Pill as ‘feminists,’ many changed their practices, realizing that “sexual availability given by the Pill is at the expense of health and libido and is socially unhealthy for men.” (Sigal). She adds: “When women take the Pill a freedom is achieved but she is being in severance and disconnected from her real self.” Against medicalization, the feminist strategy of questioning men’s role within the equation can see the use of ‘medications’ as abuse of the female body when women are solely responsible for contraception: “Men should be responsible for not getting women pregnant.” (Lital). This leads to a holistic approach which connects women to choose nature, their cycle and controlling their fertility without synthetic hormones as their priority:

The Pill reduces sexual pleasure for sure and... passion, vaginal moisture, breast swelling and more...the IUD also lowers sexual joy because women suffer from bleeding, pains, infections...If men knew that the Pill and IUD lower the sex drive in women they wouldn’t want their partner to use them. (Rona).

Pro-life views include fatalist or spiritual attitudes and an openness to becoming pregnant and surrender to what is bigger than themselves: Even if you use contraceptives, if your body and mind want to become pregnant, you will. The body can save eggs and release them whenever it wants. (Ella).

This belief assumes the existence of a higher intelligence beyond rational capacity to control fate. Women who don’t use contraceptives have had difficulty getting pregnant or are religious are “open if a soul wants to come to life through my body.” (Deborah).
Pro-choice views which focus on the lived-body; the woman herself, her own experience and her well-being are also present:

A fetus shouldn’t be carried if the woman isn’t ready for it and the process should become all right, monitored and orderly in Israel. This process [of abortion] is very hard. The committees in Israel only make it harder and it is difficult in any event. There needs to be an organization that supports the girl or woman in this. (Rita).

A Pro-life position is chosen when unexpected pregnancy is perceived as Divine will and meaning that this integrated experience is part of woman’s higher path. This chosen ideal isn’t the experience in all circumstances. Abortion is acceptable when women experience ownership over their bodies which doesn’t fragment or reduce body from being a part of their whole being into being a uterus. Pro-choice options focus on the woman’s well-being and this practical decision is a direct outcome of the reaction to how each woman subjectively experiences her body at each given time.

**Implications of ‘Naturality’ on Fertility and Society**

“Fertility is directly linked with menstrual health!” (Sigal); “Sexual and menstrual health are directly interlinked and shouldn’t be compartmentalized.” (Rita). Male gynecological hegemony causes the separation of these categories and also the division between the uterus and the rest of the female body. This demands increased awareness of gender and health for holistic treatment of the whole woman since: “There is no such thing as a woman’s doctor!” (Lee). Functional infertility is due to hormonal imbalance, mechanical infertility can be due to infection in the uterine lining and idiopathic infertility frequently is due to stress and environmental hazards (Ha’elyon, 2004). Treating the woman and not just her reproductive organs can be done through improving her diet, balancing her emotions (through stress-reduction methods) and strengthening her body (through appropriate exercises). Accumulated emotional and physical tensions that peak adjacent
to the bleeding phase are vented and purged through menstruation’s regulatory valve.\textsuperscript{17} Whether stress release is from an active or a reactive place and whether the energy balancing that happens due to menstrual shifts in women is pseudo-scientific and non-biological, this rebalancing and regulative power of life is experienced and could very well contribute to explaining the gender gap in life expectancy! Rona states: “The dead cells are scraped off the insides and this regulating process extends her life...just like men age less in the face because they shave and scrape it daily.”

Botox, plastic surgery and having Fallopian tubes tied are common procedures that are out of the question for this sample, due to the high priority they place on naturalness. To address the difficulty of getting pregnant, medical, surgical or chemical intervention is a last resort. Topical cosmetic aesthetics is external, so use of minimal make-up or hair removal is less severe but invasive technologies affect one’s internality: "I can’t even think about infertility treatments because it’s not natural; to make, divide and decide which will live is much too meddling. What’s it for Him? He created the world...If I am happy and balanced I will function better.” (Iris). In the woman’s hands there is a deep concern for being healthy, eating right and striving for well-being, but it is also in God’s hands. Nature and creation are seen as one and are valued above the results that modern technology can produce: “IVF babies are lesser than natural offspring which is a price society pays for not being watchful. Science can’t replace nature.” (Anna). Also certain contraceptives are seen as horrendous: “It’s a crime to my way of seeing it when a woman wanders around with an infection [caused by usage of IUD] in order not to get pregnant. The complications are so logically clear.” (Rita). Rivka is not surprised either when complications arise:

\textsuperscript{17} Menstruation offers women a way of releasing \textit{everything}, renewing the blood and resetting the entire system, just like the moon renews itself. However, esoteric Taoism believes that routine menstruation is wasted ovarian energy which adept practices can halt through inner alchemy, redirecting and cultivating this ‘female sexual energy’ so to nourish the inner organs, instead (Chia & Chia, 1986).
Two friends put in some type of device that releases hormones which prevents menstruation and this shocked me. Both became clinically depressed. I told them immediately that it is connected to this. I can’t understand how a woman can’t once a month let out her waste and junk. When you leave it in the body, you get depressed. I think that is terrible.

Pro-activeness, given that biologically women are born with a fixed number of eggs, is exemplified by Sarah: “It’s wild. We were actually in our mother while she was in our grandmother's womb…to take Royal Jelly of the queen bee that produces endless amount of eggs and is so fertile, can help maintain the quality of our own eggs.” This is something nature provides and is therefore legitimate; reflecting upon nature and sharing how its gifts can benefit, accords to the homeopathic principle of ‘like aids like.’ Martin (1991) deconstructs the myth that the egg is passive during conception. Sarah and Iris demonstrate that women can be active also in terms of maintaining their fertility. Rona even finds meaning in menstruating when the aim of the woman is pregnancy:

Every month there is a type of spiritual elevation, as if I am starting over the next month at a better place that I was in the last month. Now, I understand that women going through fertility treatments need to accept their periods as a blessing and say “I will change something more next month.”

In social interactions, ‘naturality’ advocates resisting stigma or taboo by answering back or keeping silent and disregarding the ignorance of uneducated people or being willing to explain to others what they are eager to learn:

I ignore all the stigmas and fanatic people. If someone is ready to hear me, I will tell them that I am in love with my menstruation to make them rethink it and hear the other side. Nothing is one-sided in the world; what we don’t see, doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. (Shiraz).

We are so bogged down by the taboos, I tell my girlfriends about the Keeper, that I even rinse it in the shower and they just don’t get it…We need to make an issue relevant, like gender…It’s the curse? Something you deal with and don’t talk about? I do talk about it! (Yamit).

What angers me to the verge of murder is when people say ‘Oh! Are you sick?’…No! I am in a mysterious amazing time of existence.’ What is sick in this exactly, I try to inquire, pregnancy, which is in the same family, is also a sickness?” (Tsili).

Existence precedes actual life and essence has a subjective quality (Sartre, 1966). Warped notions are used to deconstruct the mindsets of the people these women teach.

For example, to question publically if anyone has ever seen clear blue menstrual blood
as seen in television ads. The media shows blue liquid on nylon pads, women in white tight clothing which indicate that women are not bleeding, need to use ‘hygiene’ products, ‘sanitary’ towels and ‘napkins’ to conceal the mess ‘to function or at least pass as normal:’ “To dismantle the suppression is to see where it comes from, to resist stigma is active, continuous work, it’s not just a lightening bolt of understanding.” (Rita). Another educator explains:

I work with girls and use ads to show them it’s all about aesthetics but that’s not our reality. Accept yourself in your light and also when in darkness; when feeling great and also when we feel depressed and irritated. It is all okay; they are all facets of ourselves. We need to embrace it all even though society wants us only happy, silent, gentle, oppressed, but only being otherwise will keep us sane. (Galya).

These informants see menstrual education as part and parcel of sexual education. They also have come to terms with their bodies and its effects. Therefore, they speak out openly and naturally about it as something that is perfectly natural and respectable.

**D: Widening Space to Accommodate Changing Boundaries**

Consciousness is influenced by the spatiality of a person’s body within which we create our values and determine our meaning of life (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Sartre, 1966). Therefore, if what is valued is most accessible in solitude that necessary condition becomes vital to one’s identity. Smooth social reaction and proper bodily conduct, in the Western context, is the controlling of the natural rhythms and urges of our bodies. Belching, breaking wind and expressing emotion break the flow of interaction and hard work is needed to recover and repair that flow. (Howson, 2004: 2). These actions create inner space but also boundaries are broken. The blood breaks the body’s physical boundaries as things are being let out; awareness is then required to monitor what is being let in from the outside: “When we lessen input from our regular surroundings, we have more connection with the cosmos and something good can enter.” (Mina). Despite society, another informant accentuates this uniqueness:

The Western modernized world wants to erase the changes...to blur it [menstruation] and it is part of blurring me as a woman...we are expected to be the same everyday. Otherwise, we are interpreted as unstable. It’s absurd that women who act to attain gender equality are in effect erasing themselves. (Dina).

Dina sees the dangers of women who become more masculine in order to perform and she stresses the gender différence. Rona tapped into this différence that manifests in her
body’s routine pattern, its changing boundaries and hormonal flux and decided, ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’. She has learned when it’s the right time of month for her to socialize and how to cooperate with her hormones: “A woman gynecologist once said to me, ‘What we spoil in five days of PMS, we need the rest of the month to fix!’” Mina shares a similar perspective: “I give myself much more space to shout at the trees and do whatever I want and return later.” Insights come when the body is let to do what it is meant to do and go to places it wants to go, as expressed by Anna:

Several days before my period there is something inside me that wants to withdraw and be within myself. If we don’t keep the energy within, there is edginess and friction. I get angry and impatient when I am outward at this time. Actually, it is very beautiful; I am just where I need to be and have a lot of space to watch what comes that month.

Having less self-restraint and being over-sensitive prior to the bleeding phase is to have “less filters” (Lital) in which “there are no defense mechanisms and the whole truth comes out” (Sigal) due to the changing sense of boundaries, which require alternative buffering mechanisms. Volatile and leaky bodies (Grosz, 1994; Shildrick, 1997) and “a thinning of the skin” (Sigal), outside stimuli need to be reduced and the requirement for more outer and inner space is accomplished through lifestyle changes (avoidance of social meetings and sex during and around menstruation, lowering one’s pace and work intensity and by creating personal and women’s spaces) which support the monthly changes and shifts.

Space means not to have a taxing routine and to have space in time and time in space. Outright verbal or emotional explosions are seen as pre-menstrual therapy that clears the air for one’s ‘red tent’ to be experienced from a place of positive force and equanimity.

While Tsili and Lital prefer to be out and about and take aspirin, and Deborah finds her ‘me-time’ in daily swimming, most others prefer to “take a step back stop and rest.” (Lee).

Energetically, there is a need of an outward flow: not to stop the inside flow by tampons or swimming, not to let in male sexual or public energies while the system is being cleaned out. The bleeding sensation causes a sense of volatile borders and self and cause
women to hold an out-of-control status (Grosz, 1994: 205; Shildrick, 1997: 34). *Niddah* has the capacity to render the vulnerability, changing sensations, identity and sense of control to be felt as either empowering or disembodied. Making lifestyle changes during menstruation, to promote health and well-being through physical and temporal space, turns out to be a political and feminist issue. Women want to enjoy their pleasant and not so pleasant experiences and cope with their sensations and blood flow within the privacy and comfort of their own space. “*Niddah for me signifies space, just space.***” (Sarah). This *niddah* space is a place and period in time necessary for inward retreat processes. It is established from the outside religious norm and Bible, but also by the inner experience of changing boundaries and the need to pause.

Demanding this space is another story. Power relations and the ‘double-shift’ typify the gender dynamics in society, in which women function in the workplace and still tackle most of the routine responsibilities in the private sphere, constantly sacrificing themselves. However, reclaiming the cycling body’s needs sets new limits: “*I don’t do anything for my children at this time; they warm up their own food.*” (Galya). A women’s yoga instructor adamantly states:

*Only a woman can empower herself* because when she is with herself that’s what empowers her because she is in tune to what is going on…There is no other way but to adjust our life to the energetic state of the body…It is impossible to be in full turbo all the time. (Rona).

A mother of a large family and a high-tech worker add respectively: “*Women should find something that is sacred to them and be really strong about it, especially in the first year of marriage and after having your first child.*” (Deborah); “*Shifting from being abused as a woman is a whole process…taking care of myself, I respect myself as a woman. I will respect others automatically the way I feel and respect myself in that space.*” (Anna). Sickness is a form of resistance to oppression which gives women time-out and a doctor’s note or ‘diagnosis’ can legitimize pain and rest (Sered, 2000: 156). However, women can
choose to empower their selves by claiming space, without buying into the stresses rooted in gender roles.

*Niddah* widens space because when women aren’t accessible sexually this gives them automatically more space. ‘Blood space’ includes a changing sense of one’s protective energy field during menstruation and is a temporal and spatial relationship that requires self-adjustment. During this liminal transition, ‘betwixt and between’ positions assigned and arranged by law, custom, convention and ceremony is the pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas may arise (Turner 1969: 95). Menstrual blood on the surface of the body represents the movement of the natural world into the social world, which reinforces the significance of the margins of the body it breaches, exposing vulnerable points of contact between the two worlds (Douglas, 1966; Hawson, 2004). Demarcating a boundary between self and other seems to be necessary. Fluidity is a borderline state which disrupts the solidity of things. As the menstrual blood passes with different degrees of control, it exits the body and attests to the permeability of the body and to the division between the body’s outside and inside.

‘Expressive power’ is the becoming and development of a certain quality through regulation, cultivation and relation to other powers and also manifests through body images (Gatens, 1992; Grosz, 1994:193-5). Struggling to find the right words, the body image during menstruation is described as: “…*a permeable, aqueous membrane, like a dynamically changing amoeba.*” (Iris); “The body physically changes, becomes bloated, filled up and flooded, open more than usual, exposed.” (Lital); “It’s like a garment or envelope that is turned inside-out so you see the inside. The inner essence of our inner wisdom and knowing comes out into being.” (Galya). These images convey a sense of possibilities and vulnerability. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) conceptualize the body as a container in which influences from the outside enter us. The body is discharging and filling back up in a container-like experience. Portrayed as a leaky bodily container, substances enter
and are released as the inside and outside are interconnected and the body-boundaries become the embodied self (Johnson, 1987; Battersby, 1999: 355). Container, in this context is personified as having agency and intent as well as levels of feeling and cognition. The spatiality of the human body and body images express how perception has psychological and physiological factors (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The existential being’s inside and outside boundaries are perceived and influenced beyond this metaphoric reality by the emotional aspect of the dynamic becoming of our bodily boundaries. These boundaries may undergo extreme physiological changes, are flexible, leaky, in constant becoming and part of dynamic embodiment (Shildrick, 1997; Battersby, 1999; Grosz, 1999). The rhythmic sloughing and thickening of the uterine lining changes the inner and outer experience of our borders and immunity: “I experience the boundaries of the body changing.” (Mina). Another interviewee describes a similar experience: “everything is wet and open.” (Sarah). One’s body consciousness and reality is revealed through the body images we choose to depict our experiences. Marshall (1996) and Grosz (1994) express the fragile, slippery inner dialogue between the body and our identity; the continuance of the inside that affects the outside which affects the inside.

Implications of Institutionalizing Space

Recognition can make menstrual needs audible despite political and economical motives of society and religion that prevent certain entitlements. This research has pinpointed several manifestations in the local setting that indicate promising and forthcoming change. ‘Personal leave law’ has potential to honor menstruation.18 “12 days a year, one

---

18 Menstrual Leave Law precedents: South Korea: [Law 5309 (1997) of Labor Standards Act] employer shall allow a female worker one day’s menstruation leave with pay per month. In (2003) Act included reduced statutory working hours per week from 44 to 40 hours, abolished monthly paid menstruation leave. Indonesia: since 1998, women are entitled 2 days unpaid menstrual leave each month. Japan: [Equal Employment Opportunity Law (1985) & Labor Relations Act on Monthly Menstrual Leave] women workers can request leave when they find it extremely difficult to work during their menstrual periods. She determines whether it is difficult for her to work; a doctor’s certificate is not required.
day a month; a rest day to have off or to have the option to work from home, wearing loose clothes in my coziness is how I see such a law.” (Lee). However, some informants have reservations because women, who don’t take time out in general, when given the time, won’t necessarily use it to their own personal benefit. Other women see it as ideal in a sane society which considers the changing capabilities of all its members: “If we were a society that respects its women, we would give women an additional day bonus.” (Galya). But the opposite is also true as Brown’s study (2007: 88) concludes: “If more women enjoy being women, society will change.” This point is explored further in this current study: “Our cyclic body needs to be included in our culture, for today is a machine culture. Just like in the stock market there is a cycle as in nature but culture distorts nature.” (Iris). “I feel excited with my inherent dynamic and ability to change, but in modern Western society we are expected to be the same everyday or we are seen as being unstable.” (Lee).

This research finds that calling it ‘menstrual leave law’ is not preferred, not because of shame but because “this is a private, intimate matter and not everyone’s business.” (Rivka); “Anybody, whenever they aren’t feeling well should have ‘personal days’ for different things and not need to tell why. In general, I am in favor of less work in society, more family time and personal time.” (Deborah).

‘The Red House’ and a ‘secular mikveh’ are recent initiatives to create sacred spaces for local menstruants, providing a getaway place for sisterly support and renewal. Wasserfall (1999) found segregating customs, such as menstrual huts, as contributing to purification, health and bonding. This proves that modern self-segregation among women can be connected to positive force: “The red tent sort of thing gives women time to be together, and if they use this time to their benefit it can definitely empower learning from each other and enjoying each other’s company.” (Yamit). Lee understands the logic in this project and the comfort of being amongst women at this time since: “It is important to be amongst women at this time, they can understand me and women can contain each
There are women (such as KM Yael Dayan in a personal communication) who don’t advocate these aforementioned proposals for fear that such a law may fuel the patriarchal structure that already secludes and discriminates against women. For Israeli society to thrive while keeping its sanity, we need to continue to be innovative and improve output through breaks of ‘spacing-out’ and disconnection from the rat-race.

Besides the above initiatives, diverse trends and sub-cultures contribute shared meanings and symbolic significance. Thus, celebrating menstrual events can help lessen the existing dissonance and alienation (Brumberg, 1997; Martin, 2001). In addition or instead of the Bat Mitzvah tradition, establishing a ceremony for every girl that gets her menarche, can add respect and visibility to the natural rhythmic pattern of women and their bodies. The source of holiness in women’s biology is part of a feminist spirituality that sanctifies life and can lead Jewesses to feel dignity through new rituals for female rites of passage (Kien, 2000: 222). Rita shares enthusiastically about the fun and fuss that was done for her menarche: “My friends made for me underwear that they drew on.”

Goldstein also suggests that since knowledge and activism instill new customs into Judaism that a Jewish menarche celebration could become normative.\(^{19}\) This tradition, linked to niddah and the lunar cycle, I suggest calling ‘Chagigat Bat-Yisrael.’

\(^{19}\) Personal communication with Rabbi E. Goldstein in July, 2009.
Reframing menstruation through alternative models and creating new terminology, challenges the dominant discourse that subordinates the female body to the male perception. Perception is what counts in understanding the world and being involved in it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Sexed corporeality examines this through the phenomenological descriptions of women (Grosz, 1994). Positive psychology, optimism and holism contribute to creating a positive setting for reformulating menstruation as an event that is respected and anticipated. Certain conditions (such as knowledge, an inner knowingness and self-confidence) enable women to defy the norm of menstrual suppression. By ushering in their cultivated positive force, they may chose to self-segregate themselves, adapt new models that redefine menstruation through fresh metaphors ‘that they live by’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This research suggests a ‘naturality’ model, based on cycles in nature: “I started noticing a pattern that I get super sensitive to things around me which can stir up negative thinking patterns due to…pregnancy hormone…I analyze everything.” (Sarah). Rona seems to have mastered the hormonal effect: “The hormones cause me to see the world once as horrible and once as beautiful; when there isn’t estrogen, I am down...when there is progesterone I am protective. To get to know them [hormones] is the only way to save the situation.” Another aspect of this metaphoric model is based on the nature of a wave’s cycle, in which the ebb is appreciated as necessary: “I arranged it in my head that it’s a theory of waves...part of being whole is also to be in the low part of the wave in order to become strong.” (Gili). Dina provides the breath cycle angle of this grounded menstrual theory. The respiratory stages justify the natural need for her to pause before and after bleeding: “Just prior to menstruation there is a difficulty in communicating with the surroundings and a need to be at home; after the period build-up, there is like an exhalation of the uterus. Following this exhalation, there is a need to pause, to receive from the self and from the upper world.”

Although an element of nature-based spirituality is ever-present in their experience, most women are more characterized by their ‘naturality’ rather than by their spirituality.
Confidence results from power attained through knowledge and reflection which integrate cognition with the body and being. This leads to redefinition of concepts and experience and active agency that resists the status quo. Questioning cultivates more suitable interpretations that can, in turn, support one’s insight: “Tameh and tahor are the language of men.” (Rivka); “I am not sure we should use the concepts of purity and defilement in relation to the body of a woman or a man.” (Mina). Reflection structures experience, and through consciousness, values and the meaning of life are determined (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Sartre, 1966). Translating, avoiding or deconstructing the concepts tumah and niddah reveal women’s own terminology and meanings that refrain from impacting otherness (Goldstein, 1998; Fonrobert, 2000; Ner-David, 2005).

Such women imbued with spirituality learn from everything, attach meaning to mundane events and add value and depth to routine experiences. We influence reality, experienced in our daily lives, by the way we interpret the facts and reframe what happens to us. To expand meanings accommodates menstruation as a part of life. The problem is that we have been conditioned for so long to expect women to suffer at this time, believing and assuming it is a normal, unfortunate fact of life (Worsley, 1990: 126). Rita shifted from being “excited in a positive way” and “feeling high from the thought that something very good happened” to having aches: “More girls got their period after me said about it, that it’s supposed to be painful and maybe that’s why it started hurting me.”

A woman who has debilitating menstrual pain is imbalanced as this is merely a symptom of an underlining pathology that requires holistic treatment. Enjoying the experience of our body at this ‘time of the month’ and refusing to be labeled, victimized and objectified is a choice that aware women have. Defining premenstrual syndrome as real (Lorber, 2000) automatically causes much psychosomatic suffering. Women have the option of dismissing confining definitions and embracing others: “I don’t have any side-effects of menstruation. Probably most women suffer from the PMS phenomenon. If
you are balanced there are no side-effects of menstruation or menopause. A woman isn’t supposed to be all the time suffering with her body.” (Tzvia). This point is strengthened further:

PMS is a social construction. It’s a fact that I do not have it and that I passed on to my daughter different codes. She also does not have it or any pain because of culture and doesn’t feel crazy because the education she absorbed was from my attitude....After many years of conveying to your body behavioral codes, it acts in accordance. For years, you tell your body you are supposed to have stomach and lower backache and be nervous and subconsciously, it internalizes these messages. (Shiraz).

Every woman has a monthly, personal workshop; an opportunity to release all the dregs; our most embedded patterns surface in order to release them. A woman can get scared or depressed from this, but that’s simply an interpretation of the process that’s occurring. The hardest places in us surface to get cleaned out. If a woman agrees to contain and release this, she understands that she’s undergoing an energetic process that is a gift. (Galya).

Bleeding is an intuitive time, since it is a time which releases a lot of things, enabling us to connect to good thoughts. When…cleaned out… the symptoms of menstruation improve. Menstruation is a time in which women can release a lot of mental stress and toxins from the body. (Sigal).

‘Renewed bodily becoming’ is part of the holistic approach of being, in which meanings are given to experiences through spontaneous rituals and contemplation. Weakness and fatigue are eased as self-compassion is expressed towards one’s condition as redefinition regards cramps as connecting women to their source of strength: “It’s practice for childbirth, which is what my father would tell me; these monthly cramps prepare women to cope with labor pains.” (Ella); “Femininity contains this thing in it. The period wouldn’t bother me, if only it didn’t hurt so much, but it has helped me grow in all kinds of ways.” (Anna). Feeling blood flowing or the sensation of menstrual contractions and releases can be reconceptualized as the actual experience of being alive in a female form. It is also an indication that one’s blood circulation needs improvement (Chia & Chia, 1986).

Menstruation signifies reproductive vitality and is seen as holy. Menstrual blood is a living matter that helps to sustain and bring forth life, but it can also be seen as matter out of place (Douglas, 1966). The reverse is true, as there is cause for concern when the body isn’t naturally issuing blood periodically out of its system. “Menstrual blood symbolizes life – it has always been like that for me....In war, blood symbolizes death. Blood is
needed to clean out the body like a detergent, this is necessary for life to continue. A woman who doesn’t have menstruation, for her it’s a type of death, an end...” (Mina).

Use of empowering and embodied language conveys a more favorable and honoring attitude towards blood, which in turn reshapes reality. Gvionit is a meaningful Hebrew translation, in feminine form, given locally to the menstrual cup by its users. Uterus in Hebrew is a masculine word, but Gili speaks about it in feminine form, Mina speaks about God also as female, Ella feels “like a goddess,” during her menses, Mother Earth is an intrinsic part of Galya’s narrative and she exclaims “Vacances!” to signify her inner vacation she enjoys, beginning and legitimized by the onset of her period. ‘Red tent’ and similar rituals of celebration also redefine the menstrual event. “Every period is something great. Today, I have the experience of celebration....I am one with my system that works.” (Gili). For women recuperating from anorexia, getting a period is a reason to celebrate and a sign of restored physical health (Gooldin, 2002: 128). It is celebrated when it finally returns, after a long absence, but the informants of this research appreciate it when it regularly returns, month after month.

Several women share that around menses they don’t have filters and therefore they ‘say it like it is’ and see this as being loyal to their true voice, instincts and intuition. “Boundaries are broken and crossed” (Sigal). “When physically blood and emotion flow out, this leads to lesser physical and more spiritual time. The lower forces (nefesh) that leave the body with the blood yield a place for higher channeling and forces.” (Lital). The pre-menstrual oversensitivity is interpreted as a positive trait and as a cleanse: “A few days before menstruation an inner preparation occurs automatically and there is an emotional cleanse!” (Lital). Rivka asserts: “In the beginning of my period I feel oversensitive which leads

---

20 A decade and a half after I introduced this product to the Israel market, a term has been created by a women’s forum (beofentv.co.il) to accurately describe the menstrual cup as a small grail. To prove it has even penetrated into the mainstream, the term was used freely in an article describing the local trend of more and more women who are switching from tampons to the Gvionit. (At, Dec. 29th, 2009).
to a flow of vision and a feeling of truth...I feel I become dazed at this time but this brings with it a different type of consciousness.” Due to body changes, women experience dreams and flashes of wisdom, focused determination and truth more than at other times.

**Women’s Authenticity Revealed through Menstruation**

The fundamental freedom of life is making a conscious choice to live one’s life ‘authentically’ or not (Sartre, 1966); and menstruation can thus be consciously chosen to be experienced through its authenticity, existentialism and phenomenology. Living an authentic life filled with passion and compassion, it is possible to emanate our unique selves while we constantly renew them. Women have the capacity to positively experience themselves even though “what patriarchy suppresses is usually actually a treasure women need to uncover and fight for.” (Galya). As a result, Shiraz discloses: “Life has taught me that the pain we experience isn’t true pain and I have removed all my masks and facades. What is important is to experience everything in totality.” (Shiraz). Due to social norms, such authenticity and integrity are not often experienced or observed in others. So, is the norm a deviance and the deviance important to reinstate as the norm for a more humane society?

Authenticity is the one seminal value from which the elemental quest for truth, the demand for sincerity, the intolerance for and impatience with externals, all come together through a sense of individuation. This is a process of truthfulness to oneself and one’s maker. Anyone or anything that helps in this process of authenticity is considered holy (even menstruation). To be truthful requires being self-analytical to makes sure that one’s own action is motivated by part of a process of attempting to be real (Rosen, 2008). This mission is prevalent amongst ‘involved’ menstruants, who are not adopting an alternative counter-culture conditioning. They are connecting to their inside reality in order to access a deeper and deeper truth.
This research shows repeated accounts of how the Pill causes a woman to be cut off from her real-self and how we empower ourselves by accepting with totality each situation that we are in, because otherwise we are ultimately harming ourselves. Only by accepting reality can we then strive to improve upon it.

**Holistic Parallelism of Spiritual Embodiment**

Body-grounded spirituality encompasses a parallelism between the physical and the spiritual by its very nature. Integrating matter and consciousness, the body is seen as a source of immanent spiritual energies and as a sacred reality. What is let in and let out; ingested and purged, happens on both the physical and metaphysical levels. Dynamic becoming is experienced in the spiral menstrual cycle through its inherent developmental change from month to month: “There is a renewal also on a spiritual level...as if to release from yourself what you don’t need for the rest of the way. That’s the regulation [veset is the Hebrew that means regulation and menstruation] between what there was to what there will be.” (Rona). Menstruation is a time of cultivation, preparation and fertilization of new ideas:

The bleeding time is a time of great magic It’s a time to seed before the sprouting time...it is the sowing of new wishes into this empty place of lack...Simultaneously, something is filling up and emptying out on all levels...What I want to release, like rigidity, I intend to release. (Dina).

*Niddah* is the dark moon which distinguishes between the waxing and waning phases of the body. Spiritual upliftment that occurs as a result of body practices and transformation that happens through spiritual rituals construct the female body in which the physical state changes in response to the spiritual state and vice versa (Sered, 2000: 108). Tracking emotional, energetic, sexual, creative and productive levels during the course of each menstrual cycle helps women ‘ride the waves’ and master their biorhythmic patterns. This is a type of teacher: “I teach myself to love my body like it is...Women need to understand that they get once a month a type of gift. They should learn to
enjoy it and use it.” (Rivka). What happens on the embodied level is a reflection of life.

The Jewish lunar calendar has the Sabbath and the New Moon as periodical times of an ongoing cycle of holiness, separated from the rest of the days of the month. Shiraz speaks about a similar grace period that is connected to spirituality experienced in her period: “Menstruation is holy... an inner rhythm... the ability to separate the self and this time from one’s routine, to stop and restart. It’s a blessing of washing out mentally and physically.” Sarah shows how every end contains the beauty of a new beginning: “It's wild! While the dead is coming out during the bleeding a new egg is being created! Something is growing and starting as something else is ending.”

The period is the visible stage of the menstrual cycle. In fact, from menarche to menopause the body is in the midst of a larger cycle. Bleeding, nursing and birthing are forms in which the female body constantly releases something out of it, since its nature contains and absorbs: “The female is always meant to release energy from the body – when it’s not releasing red blood it is releasing white milk.” (Rivka). The monthly discharge may be seen as a rejuvenating mechanism that clears the uterus of potentially harmful materials (Martin, 1991): “Every month our body is meant to let go of toxins, old cells and whatever our body absorbs from our partner, surroundings and life. The fact that we bleed means that our body makes new blood and it’s a good thing.” (Sarah). “To lose blood, changes the blood and freshens it.” (Rona). This shedding, on the other hand is an existential sign of atrophy which indicates: “a passing of time... my body is slowly disintegrating with each period.” (Deborah). All niddah interpretations, meanings and experiences are equally true and valid (Ner-David, 2005: 360). Cycling is a developmental process; a spiral movement through each menstrual phase which adds existential wisdom, depth of purpose, “a return to the source” (Galya). Martin (1991) also shows how the egg is in fact active during conception. Similarly, ‘involved’ women actively menstruate – as the body is the very passage from being to becoming, with the emergence of meaning on the
Corporeal level (Colebrook, 2000: 86).

Bleeding is the end of the last cycle and the beginning of the new cycle in which we plant new seeds. It’s like that in the body. On the first day of blood a hormone is released that begins the development of follicles in the ovary. It’s a speck of light in the darkness, the beginning of new life! (Dina).

Self-judgment, taking responsibility and monitoring oneself foster reflexivity and meaning-making which are parts of the human condition in late modernity (Giddens, 1991). Embodiment is a more conscious reality experienced through body images which support the ongoing process of acceptance of the body and its flow. Chinese medical philosophy and New Age jargon have been employed through use of images in several women’s body narratives. Rivers, life-force, energy, flow, harmony and balance are terms used to define and conceptualize the body using images imported from the natural world. The dynamic becoming and being are expressed through physical sensations, interpretations of identity, feelings, spiritual meaning and purpose. This enables authenticity to be experienced by means of the female body. This reflexive project of dynamic embodiment is attuned to inner subjectivity (Ha’elyon, 2007: 48).

As cleanliness is Godliness, all grooming preparations prior to mikveh immersion, such as flossing teeth, clipping nails, removing nail polish, combing out tangles, can be seen as the physical preparation of the spiritual purification. Yet despite this holistic parallelism, men don’t go through these regimens and their immersions are no less purifying. This shifts us back to the subtext of the niddah conflict.

Towards Solving the Conflict of Niddah

Regardless of women’s degree of religiosity, they are located in a charged context (Sered, 2000: 106). This creates a ‘niddah conflict’ of dissonance and ambivalence which may cause women to feel humiliated, even dehumanized, or to reject the entire observance of niddah altogether. Therefore, niddah should be explored along with menstruation, identity, feelings and experience. Niddah practices, including lifestyle
changes within the context of ‘involved and embodied’ menstruation, need to be rescued. This is why I politically chose to conflate niddah with actual menstruation.

Thus far, niddah’s menstrual aspects have been ignored by all. It is my argument that niddah supports the holistic experience of conscious menstruating. As menstruation allows women to potentially have a more wholesome niddah observance including a change of pace. A female body-oriented perspective grasps niddah, not only as a process of becoming impure or pure, but as a personal engagement during her period which purifies the nefesh and renews the body (see: section 2. C). Niddah is defined by and is the bleeding itself. The spiritual focus should be on the entire period that the woman is apart.

Iris, who defines her religiosity as “love and belief in God” without affiliating herself with any sector of Judaism, claims: “Niddah is a charged subject and is now an issue in my life; it excites me.” Another woman, who does not define herself as religious, adds: “Niddah is the power of the woman not to uptake the blood and sperm back into the body because there is a need then for outward, downward movement of the blood, and the control a woman has at this time not to have intercourse frees her to retreat.” (Ella). Shiraz claims “these laws are to protect women because men are barbarians and need a barrier.” These quotes indicate that non-religious women are also connected to the niddah concept. A rationalization given by Sarah and an explanation given by Deborah are the way they make sense of this concept: “Niddah is God’s way of knowing that the libido of men and women don’t match up.” (Sarah). “I guess your body is going through a small trauma every month, releasing the egg and the lining. In terms of the Torah, it was probably more from the male point of view, of keeping her away.” (Deborah).

Rivka grasps tumah and niddah through her connection to these religious concepts and
despite her reservations and strong criticism she still finds value in the system:

My niddah practices are not constant. It depends. I go to the ocean.....but it is not necessary. I don’t do halakha of cloth and hefsek tahara. I don’t like or connect to those things. It is not for me, I cannot stand it and it seems far-fetched to go to the rabbi to show him the cloth that he should approve to you. That seems like an area that is very chauvinistic....Tumah for me is a word and way that explains to men why not to go near women. These laws [of niddah] protect women and I value these laws.

Women’s intuition to distance men periodically correlates with what God codified as law (Antonelli, 1997). Menstrual taboos enhance the power perceived as creative spirituality of menstruating women by protecting women from male attempts to pressure them unwillingly into performance (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988: 13). And not letting men approach women gives women space and control of their sex and bodies and glorifies menstruation as a time so sacred that she can’t be touched (Goldstein, 1998).

Cleansing the emotional build-up occurs through menstrual blood and tears. Water-like tears are purifying but the stickiness of menstrual blood has the social and psychological status of a fluid that dirties the body (Grosz, 1994). Tears are like rivers of moving water that bathe the eyes, naturally pre-empted by the symbolism of washing (Douglas, 1982: 125). Douglas adds that menstrual blood is a polluting fluid because it is related to the bodily function of procreation. However, aforementioned claims show this as a reason that makes the menstrual blood a sacred fluid; “a river” (Sigal) of “heavenly waters” (Lital) that flushes the system no less than tears.

Menstrual-care could be portrayed like hair-care, without implying that there is dirt to absorb. Refraining from using words like stain (ketem), menses (veset), niddah etc... or reframing the use of such terms overcomes patriarchal labels and negative connotations. Common concepts and language are then charged with positive force and subjective meanings, which reconsiders tumah and baseless customs. “What’s wrong with intercourse while bleeding is that it exposes the source of tumah itself. I like the feeling that there is a time that my body is just for me, especially because I am bleeding and it’s a mess and my stomach
In Judaism, observing the laws of family purity is stressed and the personal purification process is ignored. The solution of the niddah stigma is to realize its not so obvious value for women. Niddah begins only after a woman notices or feels the blood flowing from her uterus and it seems that the required, routine, vaginal self-examinations would encourage body consciousness, while observing laws of ‘sexual holiness’ and instilling spiritual awareness, but this is not generally the case. Rituals and practices are designed to cleanse the body and serve as metaphors for processes of cultural homogeneity without delving into their psychical and individual significance (Douglas, 1982; Grosz, 1994: 193). Most women observe niddah technically according to halakhic laws and manage the pain and bleeding of menstruation without considering their deeper opportunities. In being reflexive and sensitized, mikveh immersion can have such significance: “Cold water is charged with negative ions which purifies, simply, energetically, it cleans and conducts, it changes our energetic balance physically just by immersing in cold water.” (Lital); “Immersion ritual is a feeling of sanctity; a ceremony of holiness and purification…to pour water on hands from a vessel is really a different sensation than washing your hands.” (Tzvia). Meanings infused with physics and feelings help women understand why immersion often precedes spiritual elevation in the Torah and how this conscious act changes of one’s status in order to become a proper vessel for the sacred.

When niddah and menstruation are seen as good and purifying this is not necessarily because of the lingering taint that women are so impure that they need menstruation in order for them to purify themselves. This built-in regulatory purification mechanism is believed to contribute to the fact that women live longer than men since it cyclically purges and renews the entire system through blood-letting. In the context of niddah, menstruation is a sacred function that, if properly utilized, enables women to listen to their bodies’ messages and, if so prompted, withdraw from their usual activities to spend time in contemplation, do inner work and
re-orient themselves in preparation for their return to ordinary life. The menses is an event that turns one’s mind and orientation to the body, the being and the personal and then back to the holy and the communal.

Orientation and education contribute to conceptualizing the body as a vehicle of creativity, and the body-grounded or earth-grounded spirituality that incorporates Eastern, alternative and feminist notions aids in negotiating with the canonic discourses, by adapting an approach towards niddah which isn’t derogatory or disemboding. Re-interpretation of texts and rituals coupled with actual experience of the authentic lived-body truth, reveal the underlying spiritual meaning and essence that are beyond meanings made or given by existentialism and sociology. And as there is no one true meaning to a ritual (Turner, 1969: 9), such realizations replace the controlling surveillance of patriarchy with women’s sense of autonomy and self-determination.

Flesh contains blood and blood contains spirit. As the vehicle of spirit, of our abstract and eternal essences, the material body and its substance in the form of blood contain traces of what we are and represent:

Shechinah is present at a birth and when it leaves that creates a vacuum and it pulls something else into it, usually something not holy, energetically. And that is what the tumah is; it doesn’t have anything to do with the blood itself. It’s the lack of Shechinah that’s the tumah….In the Temple there is a lot of holiness and the other side [sitra achra] is also trying to get in. If you are in a place which spiritually can attract unholliness [or can not contain holiness], it’s better to stay away also from holy places and unholy places. In the cemetery where there is corpse tumah, spirits of impurity reside which frequent empty, internal spaces, the open womb or attach themselves to blood. According to how strong you are bleeding is how far away you should stay. (Sarah).

This is a mystical justification for why menstruating or pregnant women abstain from going to gravesites. It’s not about contamination because Torah and mikveh don’t contract tumah; it is about protecting the woman. It is important to question how a natural biological process that brings forth life can be so socially unacceptable.

After owning the texts by formally studying them, an expert informant of this research
(see: section F) concludes about *niddah* d’*Rabb*an*an* that “something is off.” Nevertheless, gender bias reinforces gender inequality and continues to keep traditional misogyny alive (Martin, 1991). Another expert informant (see: section F) shared a more poetic conceptualization of the *niddah* dilemma:

Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden into a world of mortality; the unfertilized egg is also expelled from the uterus, from the heavenly nest where we were in oneness before we are born into the world of duality. A woman undergoes a period of physically separating from her husband and all sexual relations, parallel to the inner separation of the uterine lining and unfertilized egg from her womb. She immerses in living waters to return to the original source of heavenly, paradiisical waters of oneness to recharge and restart a cycle from a point of rebirth.

In Kabbalah, the man is the light and the woman is the vessel. Women do not necessarily see ‘the vessel’ in a reductive manner but as something multi-dimensional:

> With the diminution of light, “*gearing down, taking a step back and aside, as blood is released; there is an inner space, a void in which insight, spiritual elevation and renewal occur.* As a result, women are stronger, they live longer.” (Rona). In the quiet dark, apart from mundane distractions, a woman can contain herself and can be contained in space. However, the feminist project appeals the scientific approach that views the female body as a container or vessel, choosing a more fluid definition which is less limiting. In a proactive fashion, women surmount the boundaries of the body: “*The body is a means to the Divine.*” (Shiraz). Koren (1999) tries to prove in her textual research that this is actually a barrier, but the experiences of women prove, otherwise.

*Halakhic* infertility influences women’s attitudes to be adapted or strengthened. Deborah began keeping *niddah* d’*Oraita* and after researching into it decided to stick to it: “*I am smart enough to know the difference between niddah and zavah. When you know your body, you don’t need those extra seven days. There is nothing you are waiting to see and nothing you are worried about.*” Conversely, Dina stresses, trusting her inner guidance and the *halakha*: “*An inner voice said to me: ‘Observe niddah and everything will be fine.’ Even though ovulation was within the seven clean days, a miracle happened.*” From an
integrated place, Dina asserts: “Niddah d’Rabbanan adds things because we still aren’t in a place of our essence. That’s redemption, but we have become distant, how many women today are attentive?”

Through mystical explanations, reowning knowledge through learning, experiencing the body authentically in positive ways, d’Rabbanan can be accepted through complete faith. Opting for d’Oraita out of body-intellect (Minh-ha, 1989) is another alternative. Yet the continued clash between competing ideals and values cause the need for the difficult dilemma of niddah to still be resolved further.

**F: Personal Reflections**

I embarked on this research project, given that menstruation carries problematic messages, is not spoken about at all and causes embarrassment and repulsion. ‘You are not sick and can do anything’ is the disembodying social message. Moreover, the religious subtext of tumah and niddah is quite dehumanizing. Thus, my objective was to find out how Jewish women can feel good about themselves at the crossroads of biology and religion.

Women were most willing to share their intimate experiences and inner worlds, due to a mutual dedication to the cause of giving voice to the female lived-body of menstruation. By wanting to listen to them, I empowered them to be heard. Women theorize and reconceptualize their healthy menstruation through rich associations, analogies and interpretations. Their speaking was intellectually stimulating, emotionally nurturing and inspired inter-subjective empowerment. Their enthusiasm for this research and its value was rooted in challenging culture’s norms, teaching others and learning more. For me, the heuristic process of incubation and formulation contributed to my own identity, conceptualizations, menstruation and reclamation which are all feminist triumphs.

Although I was apprehensive about navigating, driving and computerized technology,
my heightening awareness and personal empowerment, acquired through Gender Studies, enticed me into striving and succeeding in mastering these ‘masculine’ tasks. Determined to voice this New Age alternative culture and social movement that acts within the mainstream of society and strives to change it (Simchai, 2005), I digitally recorded, downloaded and transcribed interviews after driving to far away places. And my own lived-body continues to resonate with our shared dedication to live as authentically and as naturally as possible.

It was not difficult to locate such women since this counter-culture is a growing phenomenon. I also interviewed two reform rabbis (who were omitted from the sample because one is on the Pill and the other is menopausal), two post-menopausal modern-orthodox experts and a secular activist also shared their private voices. This additional research enriched the pool of information of this study.

It emerges from this research that some women who are confident about their bodies neither feel it necessary to do more than simply bathe after observing a seven day niddah period nor agree to have their personal immersion chaperoned and their body scrutinized. If they choose neither to consider niddah as abnormal zavah nor to do the prescribed procedures of inserting a ‘witness’ cloth into their post-menstrually-dry vagina to double-check that the bleeding has stopped, the length of the niddah period of d’Orita would not include ‘clean days’ or the use of colored underwear, toilet paper, bed sheets and panty-liners. Such orthodox customs are stringently implemented to avoid seeing the sight of blood on white material (which has legal status in Jewish law), so as not to reverse the process of becoming pure. Modernity questions such halakhic measures which seem far from the original intentions of the Pentateuchal code. The

21 According to Oral Law, mikveh immersion in Judaism is assumed and required for purification of tumat-niddah although this is not explicitly stated in the Written Torah.
rabbinic leniency of hiding signs through the use of colored fabric render a woman ‘permitted’ even when there may be some blood present. However, sexual relations at such times might not be advisable. The priority of women’s health and well-being should motivate niddah lifestyle adjustments.

Everyone needs to undergo purification and cleansing, not because we are dirty but because we are human beings who are striving to maintain our spiritual essence and maintain our physical, emotional and mental health. Though saunas or sweat-lodges, fasting or limiting one’s dietary consumption, energetic and holistic methods, we can purify ourselves, but with menstruation the purification is automatic.

Menstrual blood can be equated with hair trimmings and nail clippings which are old parts of the holy body that Jews bury under the ground due to sanctity. Beyond seeing menstrual blood as dead or alive, holy or unholy, best see it for what it is: something natural and significant. Not discarding it absentmindedly because of its perceived value or making a ritual out of it are options.

Sometimes, there is a need to make a big deal about menstruating, to avoid certain crowds and activities and sometimes there is not. It depends on each woman’s authentic spontaneity and autonomy of choice. Nevertheless, this project weakens the negative definitions and impact of menstruation, tumah and niddah by offering a plethora of values and meanings for these stigmatized terms. This thesis redeems niddah from being something defiling and reinterprets it as a special experience; revealing its blessing and its powerful symbolism.

~A WOMAN is the BLOOD-OF-LIFE,
ESSENCE which SYMBOLIZES HER POWER to CO-CREATE,
EMBODIMENT of FERTILE HOLINESS-OF-LIFE and CYCLIC POTENTIAL.
TO BE A JEWISH WOMAN is to have COVENANTAL BLOOD
which ELEVATES NIDDAH to SIGNIFY CONNECTION to THE GOD OF SARAH,
RESPECTING the MENSTRUAL PERIOD
as A TIME OF AWE and as a SACRED SPACE~
5. Discussion and Conclusions

In light of the literature review and the emergent themes, women’s fertility may best be fathomed in connection with the interlinked menstrual and sexual health, affected by lifestyle, economic and political issues, gender and feminism. This integration includes ways to make informed choices and reconsider the purpose and value of menstruation.

A foundation of self-acceptance, deepened through body awareness, is the condition required to have involved menstrual experiences. Being attentive and connected to the body, acquiring knowledge and appreciating nature, are grounds for holding the necessary ‘niddah space.’

This structure enables niddah to be ritualized, menstruation to be holistically interpreted and for women to defy the silencing norm and its dehumanizing stigma. Feeling special, fertile, creative and empowered redefines what is acceptable within a fresh discourse of ‘naturality,’ spirituality and authenticity. This holistic stance values the ‘natural body’ that is aware and strives to find a balance between health, fertility and aesthetics.

Chosen bodily practices obviously reflect women’s views pertaining to sexual and menstrual health within its context of fertility and reproduction, the biological means and the ends of the monthly cycle. Body awareness and body praxes are the outcome of each woman’s orientation that motivates her into creating space and redefining the significance of menstruation for herself. In this body-study, what characterizes these women in reaching positive menstrual meanings is their deconstructing, resisting or ignoring of every taboo and code. Released from these limitations, subsequent reconstructions of meanings establish an integrated and unified bodily identity. The core female-self is uncovered, through an alternative reality which rejects unnatural ideas of womanhood in favor of ultimately experiencing a menstrual authenticity.

Embodied subjectivity, an aspect of existentialism, of one’s lived experience and lived reality leads to experiencing menstruation from the inside-out. Through agency and positive force, one’s actions express one’s choices which express one’s identity of being
and becoming (Sartre, 1966; Giddens, 1991; Grosz, 1999) as exterior outside-in forces that lead to disembodiment are debated. Awareness of the sensations of the body, the emotions they create and identifying with the process contribute to the holistic experience and the active becoming (Ha’elyon, 2004). This group, within Israeli society, generates new language, alternative living and fresh conceptualizations. Having an accepting outlook, body-grounded agency and spiritual, eco-feminist action, their social implications translate menstrual health into a way of life. This growing subculture and its ‘authentic’ discourse, situated within the common menstrual discourse, seem to be shifting from margin to center. Beyond cultural or economic parameters, the allure of nature is affecting women of different social strata.

Current research supports the finding that honoring the cycle leads to rewarding menstrual states (Brown, 2007). Brown’s study on “the positive relationship with menstruation” could be seen as fragmented and disembodied since a holistic embodied relationship is with the body in all its conditions and not specifically with menstruation. Her heuristic-transpersonal dissertation on 12 Californian women (who are all not against sex during menstruation which is the bare minimum of niddah observation) is complemented and rectified by my thesis, which contributes new dimensions of Judaism, body theory, Israeli and corporeal feminisms to menstrual research.

“Menstruation is a time to practice reflecting and care that needs to be present at all times.” (Sigal). “A doorway that we close on the outside opens the inner door to access the inside. This two way door opens both in and out.” (Shiraz). These quotes express how training develops embodied qualities, such as watchfulness and attunement which enable one to tap into one’s patterns and skills that support their relationship with themselves. In response to the allegation that this work is too much about self-absorption, since the religious claim that it should be about blind faith in technically obeying God’s commands and the
liberal claim that functioning should be ‘like on any other day’ since menstruation is ‘not a sickness,’ I draw on two excerpts of the mystical teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria –the Arizal:

During the wife’s menstrual period, she is too self-aware and self-conscious to engage in marital relations with the proper spiritual orientation. The Torah thus forbids marital relations during this period. When a man has been circumcised of his gross sensual approach to marital relations, he retains more control over his sexual passion, and is thus less likely to succumb to them. His circumcision thus helps him not engage in forbidden marital relations…with his wife during her period (Wisnefsky, 2006: 567).

Menstruation causes the woman to focus on herself and her physical and emotional feelings. This is why marital relations are forbidden during menstruation; the woman is too focused on herself to focus on her husband and/or their common soul. The fact that this is so indicates the menstruation is spiritually the result of the introduction of self-awareness into humanity. The laws of Family Purity are the Divinely directed way the menstrual experience can be transformed into what it is meant to be: an educative process out of self-orientation (pp. 571-2).

These excerpts posit that a woman is meant to be self-aware and self-conscious, focusing on herself and her psycho-physical reality during niddah. Just as the dark moon disappears only to reappear for the rest of the month, a woman can use this time of niddah to wander. This is the natural niddah dynamic of going inside to go outside.

In her dissertation, Brown (2007) clearly confuses the passages of zavah and niddah of the Bible. It is required to clarify that in ancient times only the former required bringing sacrifices to the Temple and a ritual bathing, since the tumah of the latter passes merely by a seven day waiting period and there was no need for menstruants to bring a monthly offering to atone for sin (see: section 2. A). Brown’s improper claim that there was a ‘profit-motive’ is false because only abnormal genital oozing was associated with immorality and the need to atone.22 The rabbinical conflation of these categories, based on a custom (minhag) of women, was meant to prevent misunderstandings of women’s discharges, but it has led to other numerous misunderstandings. In contemporary times, re-interpretation came about by women, who are also familiar with the texts and will not

22 Yet, today there is a clear profit motive of all disposable female hygiene product manufacturers that brainwash the public that menstrual blood is dirty and to be concealed by daily use of sanitary products.
have their bodies controlled. It is up to women to create new *minhagim* of an embodied Judaism that does not cause a defragmenting experience of their identity and body.

It is important to add that this study’s findings express a certain point of view and apply to a particular group of women, during the time of its fieldwork, whilst interpretation of the body is as ever-changing as one’s awareness levels, new input and fresh experiences. As Heraclitus states, in attempting to explain change: “*You can never step into the same river twice.*” The body is different each time you experience it. Nonetheless, conclusions were reached through exploring bio-psycho-social layers of the phenomenon including personal reactions and cultural belief systems (Crabtree & Miller; 1992: 178). The women of this sample challenge the stigma and the common definition of menstruation. In doing so, they encourage other women to take charge and make informed choices regarding body-related matters.

The literature shows that there are mainstream menstrual models, but these women create new ones. Their version of how to understand troublesome concepts proves that the personal is the political in terms of their behaviors and decisions. Feminist studies on body and experience broaden the scope of menstrual research, politicize its practice and conceptualize its value through fresh formulations given to the periodicity. By researching the positive nuances of a normal and healthy process, this study criticizes mainstream menstrual research and complements quantitative studies.

A noteworthy finding of this study is that meaning and empowerment are results of conscious menstruation. These effects may be triggered simply through the use of body stretches, deep breathing, mindful meditation, and rest, the nurturing ‘laying on of hands’ upon the body and by drinking more water. While this information may be common knowledge in women’s health circles, these simple therapies are natural remedies accessible to everyone and are free of charge. Meditative movement,
conscious breathing, being aware and not caught up in passing thoughts and emotions, relaxing body tension through simple self-healing and gentle massage, all serve to balance the ‘mindbody’ and enable spiritual insight during menstruation to occur. Thus, bodywork, self-help, creative arts, self-expression, watchfulness and holistic exercises enhance niddah observance and support women’s spiritual growth. This interesting finding, related to Israeli society and Judaism, upholds the idea that in the Jewish State, where motherhood is a national mission and each Jewish woman’s womb is considered as a ‘national uterus’ (Berkovitch, 1997), sensitivity and social conditions in the private and public spheres should provide respect for the menstrual process. It is not women’s fault that they bleed, and there needs to be a social allowance to lower their gear and let the body “do exactly what it is supposed to be doing.” (Sarah).

Bliss and altered states of consciousness are attained by being in the present moment, in the body and with the breath. Spirituality through the body is body-grounded spirituality in which experiences of empowerment are embodied, wisdom is channeled and pain is transcended. It is surprising and inviting to reveal that spirituality can actually be experienced by surrendering and being aware but paradoxically… it is not simple to be simple. Not claiming to have esoteric or particularly mystical practices, despite the wholesomeness and renewal they experience, proves that laywomen attain spiritual fulfillment simply through eating well and living consciously. Being true and connected to our selves, with honesty and presence, can produce happy and meditative lives. The apparent consensus is that health, fertility and menstrual education are important investments. Regardless of their income level and social status, women who are health oriented invest greatly in their health maintenance and in their menstrual bien-être.

All feminist research is change-oriented and has action components (Reinharz, 1992: 196). The feminist agenda fuels this project in the hope of furthering menstrual
education, lobbying and legislation in society. Revealing the worth of female cyclicity provides opportunities for women to take pride in their bodies; and research on embodied experience should distill and reflect back to women its results to enable them to benefit from a pooling of embodied knowledge (Britton, 1998). Spreading this information is a type of activism and serves to re-examine the ways in which women grasp and manage their changing bodies. This contributes to their identity, questions doctors’ opinions and challenges norms through alternative practices derived from women, literature and courses.

Legitimizing a feminist perspective of menstruation validates all experiences without compelling women to conform to the norm. Being peer pressured to hide menstruation and ‘not let it interfere with life,’ but resisting this social view by talking about it, prepares girls to know what to expect and welcome. This is better than having women contain traumatic memories, unnecessary suffering and multiple phobias. Educating girls heals the next generation of women and fixes society. Only when women change their attitude towards their bodies can they change the world.

In Judaism, men have patrilineal circumcision which sanctifies and distinguishes them as Jews, initiating them into a ‘covenant of blood’ with God (Hoffman, 1996). A model that emerges, to come to terms with the modern-day predicament of niddah, is based on private meanings that support women’s self-esteem and Jewish identity, connected to their menstrual blood. Just as observance of circumcision and rest on the seventh day – Shabbat is two covenantal signs of Jews, so is the observance of niddah. By niddah, I include respecting ‘a space of her own,’ a monthly Sabbath in which menstrual blood signifies the holiness of fertility, the need for rest and sexual abstinence and the opportunity to rejuvenate and rebuild the holy temple of the soul in order to personally benefit from this religiously sanctioned niddah space.
6. Summary and Future Research

In answering the research questions, the axis of analysis which explored the body of menstrual experiences was based on a thematic framework, a phenomenological perspective and a new version of corporeal feminism. Such a perspective aims at the political understanding of the conditions within which women formulate their choices (Minh-ha, 1989; Grosz, 1994, Marshall, 1996). Grappling with the issue of blood remedies the split between blood and being, showing how menstruation, niddah and mikveh are linked to sexuality and identity, control and surveillance in society or to liberation and resistance through feminist activism and authentic experience.

At the outset of this project, it was thought to conduct a comparative analysis between conventional women who are relatively disconnected from their cycle with women who have an alternative orientation and are affected positively by their menses. Due to the complexity of categories (some do not have spiritual practices or cycle involvement but are still interested in being interviewed, others are affected positively but do not consider themselves alternative in anyway and there are also spiritual women who are not connected to their cycle or give any particular value to it), the scope of this research was limited to focusing only on alternative/spiritual women who appreciate their cycle.

Future research is suggested to be extended to these other populations and include interviewing Pill or IUD users to understand their choices and conflicts, men that revere the female biological process as life’s holiest mystery, women scholars and menopausal women on their retrospective menstrual understandings and exploring menstrual remedies and women of curious ethnicities. It is a challenge to conduct action-research on the benefits of already-involved women who learn to master and map their biorhythms and the impact a similar workshop can have upon uninvolved menstruants who participate in such a group. Last but not least, qualitative research, even within the
school system, on why adolescents also have cramps, food cravings and irregular cycles and how discomfort and suppression are influenced by mother, peer and lifestyle factors, could suggest that menstruation doesn’t have to be about suffering and shame. Subsequent studies based on the Menstrual Joy Questionnaire (1987) indicate that when menstruation is positively introduced, there are fewer complaints (Brown, 2007).

Menstrual talk is a form of resistance, with studies legitimizing and menstrual discourse helping to reverse gendered power that medicalized and silenced menstruation in the first place (Fingerson, 2006: 148). This study aids in revealing that menstruation is not a homogenous, monolithic experience, as there are as many meanings as beholders. This includes the symbolic meaning, created value and positive significance of many women. This research rethinks the mainstream approach to menstruation, “makes it relevant” (Yamit). This study reinforces existing theoretical claims (Brown, 2007) and contributes new theory through depicting a new menstrual model of ‘naturality’ based on the cyclic nature of the breath cycle, waves, seasons, emotional and hormonal tides. Expanding the meaning of this experience, by reframing menstruation, accommodates this part of healthy life. Instead of sticking to the male perspective on niddah that distances women, a female experiential perspective, from within niddah, creates space.

Theoretically, this study contributes to filling the void of needing to connect the female body to force, by anchoring the body into theory and broadening a new language that empowers women. This study exemplifies how lived-body methodology may be carried out, in choosing to speak from positive force rather than from Foucauldian oppression. The activist contribution of this study is especially important for Israeli society in which there is a double stigma on the menstruant that is also niddah. This situatedness can be experienced from an empowering place in which women sense their bodies, even when bleeding, leaking or in pain, from a place that is not limiting. Enslavement of output and
linear time are replaced with appreciating cyclic productivity and spiral evolution which access a place that provides freedom, mobility of choice and possibility.

Through redefinition that opens up new worlds, menstruation becomes a welcomed anchor, a monthly axis and a perfectly legitimate reason ‘to be on an inner vacation without needing to go on one.’ This approach constitutes a new-old paradigm of menstruation. “Just by doing this research is a contribution, because it raises awareness within the interview, and if you influence ten women, they will go on to influence others and that by itself is enough.” (Shiraz); “Just talking about it and seeing it as natural is a resistance praxis that fights the norm.” (Mina).

Menstruation and niddah, like everything else in life, is what you make of it. Inspired by alternative ways of experiencing the female lived-body, exposure at a ripe time to a fresh perception can cause immediate change. Disciplining tired bodies to work out, being trapped in yo-yo diets and endlessly following anti-ageing fads are results of social brainwashing. The solution for this predicament comes from inside the female lived-body; Rita states (laughingly): “I don’t discipline my body, my body disciplines me.”

Drawing on Sartre, these women are known through their freedom to make authentic decisions which create value. Finding the primal self, women’s authenticity can be lived out during menstruation. This research demonstrates that even in a society whose culture and religion constrain women through bodily surveillance and rampant objectification of the female body, it is still possible to be, to cultivate and to access one’s authentic self.
7. Appendixes

Appendix A: Candidate Screening Guide

Are you a Jewish-Israeli woman who doesn’t use the Pill/ IUD (never did or did and stopped)?
Do you have a natural menstrual cycle?
Do you consider yourself involved with and affected by your monthly menstruation?
Do you practice or have interests in New Age/spiritual/alternative groups/ activities?

Socio-demographic details

- Name:
- Alias you may give yourself:
- Email (optional):
- Phone numbers (optional):
- Age:
- Age at Immigration:
- Place of Birth:
- Ethnicity:
- Degree of Religiosity:
- Place of Residence:
- Number, Age, Sex of Siblings:
- Education:
- Training:
- Profession:
- Occupation:
- Work Intensity (high, low, part time, freelance):
- (below, same, above) the average Israeli Income:
- Marital Status:
- Children:
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

A. The Menstrual Experience:
1. What is the meaning/value of menstruation for you? How do you experience it emotionally and through your body? Please fill in: During menstruation, my body is like a _____ and I feel ______.
2. Has your perception of menstruation changed since puberty? Has anything exceptional in your life contributed to such a shift?
3. Have you stopped using tampons, regular pads, IUD, the Pill? What were you reasons for that choice? How did you feel and think then and what changed? How has this affected you and your menstrual experience?
4. What lifestyle changes do you adapt due to your menstruation –what things do you like to do, try to avoid or abstain from, during and/or around your period?
5. What does menstrual blood symbolize? What does niddah signify for you?

B. Menstruation as an Empowering Event:
6. What’s your approach/practice of niddah? How may niddah empower women?
7. Is there anything spiritual and metaphysical about your menstruation?
8. What enables you to resist the social norm that suppresses menstruation?

C. Menstruation as a Silencing Event:
9. Do you submit to social pressure to perform even though you are menstruating?
10. Have you had to deal with menstrual stigma? How did you manage with this situation and cope with such stigma?
11. What are your body disciplining practices related to diet, exercise, body weight, smoking, hair removal, contraception and menstrual products?

D. Applied Implications on the Lives of Women:
12. Is ‘Menstrual Leave Law’ in Israel necessary? How do you see this work?
13. How could education on menstruation be improved in schools and in society?
14. What support would you like from your surroundings in the pre/menstrual period?
15. What are your tips for women’s empowerment, fertility and health?
8. Bibliography


The Value of Menstruation: Positive Meanings of the Female Lived-Body Experience

Shirah Gil Mosas

עיבודה זו מוגנת כחלק מהדרישות לשב חלבת תואר מוסמך בתקנייה לתארים מקדמים בני למידה מגדר החינוך ללימודי ביני-תחומיים

אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

עיבודה זו מוגנת על כבודו וזכויות יוצרים.

שirah Gil Mosas © 2010 וכל הזכויות שמורות

תש”ע
עבודה זו נכתבה בהנחיית של פרופ' ליריס רפפורטיא, מנחה סטטיסטיקאי, והנחותיה מתוכננות וניתנות לעובדה על ידי התוכנית להוכחת תאורים והוכחת בדידים מעמד, והמצה海湾פדיים∕תחומיים, אוניברסיטת בר-אילן.
תקציר

מחקר אידנטי פמיניסטי הוא עסק בוחנות של קבוצת נשים מבתי מלחהורים

ביישאר, המטאורוז ואנישה והפרקטיקט־שלק, הקשורים לנה, לה uda

החששו ומשמעותה של ב. ו, המסיבות על ראוונות עם השתייה 19

נישים ידיהו-ס durée, בנו הפיציו, הפיתויות הבמהור התפשות של

נוטות לשלוח השתיים הצבעים אזור מתפיתיים בשאר. מחקר פנסיונל גוז

מחקרי האיפור שחורים ואת המחברת עתיקה נוחות טור מדורגל של

ולא מחזוריים הפילוסופים הפיזיולוגים וחיים. היבטים תיאטריסים של

לא אוקסיט産יאלים של חותינה-חיים של הפגנה, לש מכירות הת므로

להבנה ואשאפעות מתסרות פנסיוניטי בקוריאטיה. התוכנות של מחקר זה היא

הколо של משמעויות וחווית לולא את זה ואת בצאת ולהאיר את תופעה

המחזור הת(IR)יש שב עולם עד ערה.

אוכליסיית המחקר מתאפסות ברגרות על שבלועות ותוכעות. האספורט

לקושר כוכח חיותיcanoוש בון המחזור נובע גודל המקדב-ענות לשיגה בככיבת

탄ה שירות נגשה יוהד באמטרעוט אים ומיגוןוגג נפחית התיחוס

ורחיות, אוקונוגות או ביאויות. פורקריקט או ידידיות מחוזות את

周刊ונות, העימולים והונחתות עד שגש עניך נברCadHaיה ומשתנים. החקלא

מאמשים על לבראר advising החזון חוסר המכית ממחודש את החוויות המחזור התודשד

עלים שמאוספייסט עיני רוזח חיותוכי ומۇשימים יוזר ומשמיניווועו עמקות זור. כ

המחזור הנווח החזון כוגי-ייהראיל השמתנגו במכרות, הודיונות וראוי-לפון.

מחקר זה ראווה את טוישה השימוש במחזורים הפ-אספניים לולא והאמנויות-

הקוסינטיים, לולבל פרקריקט 'אטלסןבריקט', בכיסוי%=העפדה להזוה את

החווים, או התפירות וה سورياとなって את המאבק פנסיוניטס. מחקר זה מציא:

ה픽טניט סיוויאים של נשים ילדה ניאיר, יהווכו והעימות שיש דכר, נפלא

הקיראק אומנות צורח חוסינה בccion תושה לזרה, חינווכו והעימות שיש דכר, נפלא

המחזור הרסואון. הצבת על כלколо הל (('טונות את הי וס לрактиים למתוחות

יתוך להרצות חכיר ויוביט. גואזונה וציעה דוכ בן שחיתרה יכלו להפוך

לחות לותר בריאה, גיאת והочкиות ברוב חוכמה תחתוביה הקישות לעמנים

שונה זה עם מוסואלים להעניק עץ תכלית ירח מוחות הניהו של נnavigationBar, לוחפוס,

מחקר זה מראיה, שעינת הלוחות לוחות הנהיגה שהיבר דם עס כקביש ושיקומת

אותנטしょう שיש המגון ngắn, הנגשה לולא במחזור ובוים לחות והוחשיי.