

Hey Kweens!

**I heard the “menses of yesteryear” episode and felt it was important to correct some information that misrepresented Judaism there.** Of course, we all love Monica (Love you, Monica, big fan!) and I’m sure she meant no harm. Still, I think we all need to be *extra* careful when talking about communities that are frequent victims of hatred, as Jewish people often are. Unfortunately, antisemitism is still a thing (a real sh\*tty thing!) so I hope to set the record straight for the Birth Kweens listeners. I don’t want people to think that Jews believe menstruating women are dirty, contaminating monsters! (Spoiler alert: we don’t.)

Many strange rumors have circulated about religious Jews throughout history. For example, *no, we do NOT have sex through a sheet with a hole in it!* Sorry to burst anyone’s bubble who may have heard that one! Contrary to popular belief, no we do not have our food “blessed by a rabbi” to make it kosher. Rabbis also do not bless objects to make them “fit for use” by the way, as was stated incorrectly in the episode. Rest assured, things that we touch during menstruation are not considered “contaminated” either. (And that’s a relief! Who would want to live a whole week without a Jewish mom’s challah or matza ball soup?)

The truth is, in many ways Jewish tradition has a healthy perspective of sex and feminine awesomeness. Whereas some religions consider *celibacy* to be the most sacred path, Judaism considers *sex* to be one of the holiest things EVER (albeit, orthodoxy would say that it is meant for the context of marriage only, but... tomato, tomahto. Nevertheless, sexual pleasure is generally seen as a gift from the Creator meant to be enjoyed. In fact, in every Jewish wedding contract, called a “ketuba,” the man promises to provide the woman with three very specific things: food, clothing, and pleasurable sex *that satisfies her*. True story.)

Without going into more specifics to illustrate the point, I’ll just say Judaism teaches that women are powerful and great. Also, sex is great! **In this religion, Jews are encouraged to enjoy the pleasurable things in life, but with some disciplines built around them to preserve enjoyment & maintain balance.** After all, you CAN have too much of a good thing.

You know, like: Work is good. Never taking a break from work? Not so good.

Food is good! Eating anything and everything in sight? Not so good.

*Sex is definitely good!!* But it’s healthy to have some discipline around that too...

**So here’s where the practical application of that whole bible thing comes into play:**

Torah observant Jewish women observe something called “niddah” (rhymes with “yee haw!”). It is often translated as “separated,” NOT because she is separated from “others, lest they become contaminated,” but because **she and her husband are separated from each other, sexually, during this time.** Each month when the Jewish woman starts her period, she abstains from sexual relations and after a certain number of days have passed, she basically has a monthly spa day. Or spa night, I should say. She enjoys a mani-pedi, takes a long luxurious bath, and when she’s good and ready, immerses her whole body into water called a “mikvah” (either in a natural body of water,

or in a manmade indoor pool filled with gathered rainwater). End result? Mama comes out feeling so-fresh-and-so-clean-clean for a sexy date night. *\*Bow chicka bow wow.\**

**Ancient and modern Jews have observed this practice for ages, which is referred to as keeping the “laws of family purity.”** It is considered to be a sort of monthly honeymoon that keeps the couple’s sex life fresh. After these “niddah” days of abstaining from intimate touch, they have a hot date to look forward to that just so happens to fall right around the time of ovulation for most women. Pretty clever for an ancient practice, if I do say so myself!

Personally, as an observant Jew, one thing I *love* about this practice is that I have some self care built right into my monthly routine. (Lord knows I adore a nice long bath, but don’t always make the time for one, ya know?) I’ve also heard some people suggest that an added benefit to this whole arrangement is that women get some space to themselves each month without having to be physically available for their partners... No. Questions. Asked. Personally, I like my space when Aunt Flo is in town, so maybe the bible was onto something brilliant here. Of course, there are definitely people who do *not* appreciate this religious influence in their sex lives & moon cycles, which I can totally empathize with! But for me, and many other observant Jews, this practice is more of a benefit to the relationship than a bother.

**Now, about this quote read from Leviticus 15.** Although Christians obviously included The Five Books of Moses in their bible, these ancient writings (and the entire “Old Testament,” as Christians call it) are actually *Hebrew* scriptures, written by Jews, before Christianity even existed. Monica read a verse that was translated as follows: “In her menstrual impurity, she is unclean. Whoever touches her shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening...” Something a lot of people don’t know is that **many words in the Hebrew language don’t have an exact English equivalent**, which makes some of these words (like “unclean”) pretty confusing. It sounds like a synonym for “dirty” here, because no English word can really portray the true meaning. In Jewish writings, this particular Hebrew word is often translated as “ritually impure” which is a much more accurate definition (although, frankly, that doesn’t quite capture the *full* nuanced meaning either, it works.)

**Now that we’ve established that, what did it mean to be “ritually impure” in ancient times?** Well, before our temple was destroyed, Jews used to perform temple rites that required them to be in a state of ritual purity. But becoming “ritually impure” was an unavoidable occurrence, whether that be through something like physical contact with a menstruating woman (niddah), or through something else, like having sex for example (yee haw!) So men would always dunk in gathered rainwater before temple rituals, to achieve this purified state. Hey, men like their spa days too!

Now, as Allie mentioned in the episode, **it *is* true that there are restrictions on intimate touch anytime that blood is seen coming from the uterus, so this influences the husband’s role in childbirth for orthodox couples.** Different observant Jews follow these rules in different ways, though. Some don’t touch *at all* during birth and during niddah, while others only refrain from touch that is *sexual* in nature. In the Torah it also says that a Jewish woman must count a certain number

of days after giving birth before she can resume sexy time. As a doula, I can't help but see this as a biblical hint to all the partners out there. A nice way of saying, "Don't even think about it, or ask about it, any time soon. *This mama just birthed a human, so back off!*"

Like I said earlier, ancient and modern menstruating ladies could touch any object. But it is true that in biblical times, there were certain restrictions for sitting or lying together while a woman was on her period. **The way that shows up in modern life is that many observant Jewish couples sleep in two separate beds during those days of separation each month, essentially so that he will not be tempted to "approach her to uncover her nakedness," a biblical commandment for Jewish folks.**

There are many different kinds of observant Jews, by the way. Not all of them are "strictly orthodox," but that's a long story we won't go into here. Not so relevant for the Birth Kweens! On a related note, however, **there are some religious Jews who do not hug or shake hands with members of the opposite gender, but not because of periods; it's a modesty practice called "guarding the touch"** that is common in many orthodox communities. Basically, some people reserve their touch to only be enjoyed with their spouse.

In closing, I googled the article that was quoted on the podcast... #sorrynotsorry Kweens, but that writer is *not* a reliable source on religion. Now that ya'll know the *real* scoop, maybe the following excerpt will sound as strange to you as it did to me when I heard it on the menses episode. The quote was:

"Ancient and modern Jewish women had to be physically separated from others lest they contaminate men with a touch. And even objects they had handled during their period needed to be blessed by a rabbi before again being fit for use. After the period, the woman is herself ritually cleansed and free to go back to touching things, and people, for another 2 or 3 weeks."

Monica said that she was under the impression that orthodox Jews are still "livin' that life," which we now see is not actually the case. In fairness, she admitted upfront that she does not pretend to know the ins and outs of this culture. So, no hard feelings. (And hey, now you all know *WAY* more about this particular period culture than most people do, even in the mainstream Jewish world!)

I hope that clears some things up. **True, orthodox Jews are still livin' a life that pays very close attention to the menses, but not because periods are dirty, rather because they are important, sacred cycles worthy of recognition and mindfulness.**

And can we also just say: YAY for spa days! *Everyone* could use more spa days.

Shalom,  
Daci Goldin

P.S. You can message me on instagram @goldinbirth if you have any questions. Peace, Kweens!