



The Laws of
Niddah
Simplified

by Rabbi Aaron Abadi

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Introduction

Historically women were considered impure or even unclean when they got their period. They would be put out of the main house and moved to special quarters, when they had their period, and would be required to perform certain rituals and actions before returning. This is not how it is described in the Torah and this is not the meaning behind the Jewish Laws of Niddah. Judaism has a concept of Tamei and Tahor. While translators might try to say it means impurity and purity, there is no evidence to that.

In actuality, Tumaah is something that if attained, one cannot eat Trumah and one cannot go to certain holy places, such as in the Temple. The most common sources of Tumaah come from a woman who has her period and a person being in proximity to a dead body. There is a full Seder of Mishnayot dedicated to these laws. We consider these laws as Chukim, meaning we do not completely understand the concepts and instead, we take the Torah's word for it. No one is impure, no one is dirty, no one is bad. We have specific instructions for specific times within our routines. We believe in God, we believe in our Torah, and we attempt to follow it to the best of our abilities.

Much of the Laws pertaining to Tumaah and Taharah today are irrelevant, as there is no Bet Hamikdash currently, there are no animal sacrifices, and most people are Tamei today. We do not have a special red cow sacrifice that can take away the Tumaah that we all have from being in proximity of a dead body, such as by staying in a hospital. Many people look to add restrictions

upon restrictions, which is a bit absurd when the majority of these laws are irrelevant today.

In regards to Niddah, and the separation of man and woman during this timeframe, I see it more from a spiritual perspective. As I suggested, Tumaah is something that stands in the way of a person entering holy places. The sexual relationship of a man and woman within a committed relationship is a holy union that together with God, provides for reproduction and effects the continuity of the world and the completion of God's plans. There's a good reason that reproduction is the first commandment in the Torah. The Laws of Niddah are created to remove that Tumaah and allow for this connection to be done in complete Tahara. The Tumaah seems to come from the more physical aspects of human nature, like birth, death, and reproductive cycles. Tahara requires a disconnect from our more physical aspects, and an alignment with our spiritual sides. Once a woman is Tahor, there is a special environment and timing for the spirituality of the sexual relationship. The concept is to not go to that holy place until everyone is Tahor.

The object of this booklet is to present the laws of Niddah in a most simplified manner, and to limit the laws to the letter of the law. Kol Hamosif Gorea, all who add laws are actually reducing. The more restrictions we add to the already restrictive laws, end up making it impossible to keep, causing less of the real laws to be followed. The laws herein are based on my father, Rav Yitzhak Abadi's, Halachic decisions and writings.

Overview of Niddah

Women when they have their period are forbidden to have sexual intercourse with their husbands. They must count seven clean days, meaning seven days after they stop bleeding, and then they immerse in a Mikveh, which means a body of water, and then they are once again permitted to be with their husbands as before.

In this time period, there are certain rules and requirements that the Rabbis created in ancient times, as a way of keeping the two apart to avoid the possibility of transgressing the main rule of not having intercourse during this period. These are referred to as Harchakot, literally meaning separators. Ways that a man and woman should remain separate during this period. For example, they should not normally touch, kiss, or hold hands.

During the seven clean days, the woman will make a certain number of Bedikot, an internal examination, which is taking a white cloth and inserting it into her vagina to confirm that there is no longer any bleeding.

Upon the completion of seven clean days, she will immerse herself completely in water and voilà, she and her husband are now permitted to be together as before.

It sounds more complicated than it is. Most people spend days studying these laws and then don't remember any of it. Too much information is usually not helpful. As you follow these laws, you will get into a routine and you will periodically need to refresh yourselves when you feel the need, such as after a baby,

and other major family milestones. Don't read the whole booklet over again, just the relevant parts.

Becoming a Niddah

The typical way of becoming a Niddah, is by getting a period. That means a regular normal period with a regular flow of blood that you get on a regular basis. Having bloody emissions of a lesser volume or different color, or staining, would be treated differently. Having a full-fledged period is a Niddah. Now the process begins. You are forbidden to be with your husband, the rules kick in, and you will begin the counting process, as described in this booklet.

There are certain points where you are required to make a Bedika, which is an internal examination with a cloth to see if there's blood. If there's blood on that cloth, that would also make you a Niddah.

Having a significant blood stain on clothing like underwear, and the stain is red and of a proper size, can also cause one to be a Niddah. We will describe certain ways to avoid having that problem.

It will be very unpleasant to go through a Niddah cycle of about 12 days, immerse in the Mikveh, and then the next day find a stain and have to start over. It is important that you try to follow our advice here and avoid such scenarios as much as possible.

Prohibitions & Separations

When a woman is a Niddah, she and her husband are not allowed to have sex. That is the prohibition from the Torah. The Rabbis added the following additional prohibitions to make sure this doesn't happen.

In this timeframe, until after she goes into the Mikveh, they cannot hug, kiss, or even touch each other. They cannot pass things to each other, even without touching. One can just put it on the table and the other can pick it up.

They should not eat from the same plate. When they are eating alone, they should put something on the table that's not normally there to remind themselves, unless a guest is present, then it is not required. He should not drink her leftover drink.

They should not sleep in the same bed, where each will feel the movements of the other. If they have separate beds near each other, they should be separated a bit, not touching.

Neither should sleep in a bed that's designated for the other.

These prohibitions are between husband and wife only. These do not apply to men and women that are relatives etc. The purpose of these restrictions is to create a separation and a strong reminder that sex is currently prohibited.

Many people have issues with the separating of the beds, as they want to sleep in a king-sized bed. A simple solution is to get a king size bed with two twin mattresses and then during Niddah, you just need to separate the two top mattresses a bit.

The Counting

The day she sees her period is considered day 1. Let's not forget that in Jewish Law, the night and the day that comes after it, is the official day. The day starts at sunset and ends at the next sunset.

Ashkenazim count 5 days total from the day she first sees, before she can start counting clean days. Sephardim count 4 days, but it can start from the day of the last intercourse.

In any case, this is all irrelevant until she stops seeing blood. Typically, women see blood for at least 3 days. When the bleeding stops and she believes that she is clean, we can start the process of getting the 7 clean days.

Let's take for example that on Monday March 1st she gets her period. She sees blood Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and a bit on Thursday. On Thursday afternoon if she follows Sephardic Halachot, she can already prepare for the 7 clean days which will start at sunset Thursday evening, going into Friday. An Ashkenazi will need to wait till Friday night going into Shabbat, in order to have a full 5 days prior to the clean days.

The 7 clean days starts with a Bedika, known as the Hefsek Tahara. This should be done before sunset, in order to start counting the next 7 days. This bedika is done by inserting a white cloth with her finger into her vagina, inserting the full length of the finger, or as far as it will go. Then it is removed. If there are spots of red on the cloth, she is not ready and should try again the next day. Even a tiny spot of red here is a problem, as opposed to when she sees a stain on her clothing.

Pink, brown, and green are not a problem. Black, although uncommon, could be a problem.

Assuming she does this Bedika and there are no red spots, she's ready to move forward and count the seven clean days.

If necessary, this Bedika can be done hours prior to sunset. For example, if she expects to be at work at that time, she can even do the bedika in the morning.

The Seven Clean Days

During the Seven Clean Days she must use white sheets on her bed. An alternative is to wear white underwear, and/or white pantyliners or pads. The ideal solution is to wear a white pantyliner, as to avoid problems with staining. If she wears that, everything else can be any color that she prefers.

During the seven clean days there is a further need for Bedikahs. There are multiple Rabbinic opinions as to how many are required. The most stringent is two times each day of the seven days, one each morning and one before sunset.

The bare minimum is one Bedikah only during that seven-day timeframe, obviously besides the Hefsek Tahara that was done prior to the seven-day countdown.

Many women see bloody emissions randomly, and if doing a Bedikah twice a day, they will become a Niddah again and have to start the seven day count over. Then in that count, they'll do bedikahs twice a day and again have to start the count over.

Being extra stringent (Machmir) on these rules will turn into a leniency and neglect of an extremely important Mitzvah of Peru U'Revu, and will certainly not be good for the relationship.

My father recommended that you do the Hefsek Taharah on the day before as required, and then follow that with one bedika on clean day number 1 and one final bedika on the morning of clean day number 7.

Don't forget, if for some reason, you only made one bedika in the entire seven clean days, that is acceptable.

Assuming the final bedika is clean, no red spots, she is ready to go to the Mikveh.

Yom Ha'Veset (the day you expect your period)

Yom Ha' Veset is what may be most complicated in regards to calculations. Some people are just not mathematically inclined, and especially without understanding the concepts, it may seem trivial, bordering on insane. Please allow me to try to clarify and simplify this for you.

Yom Ha'Veset is the day or night where she would expect to possibly be getting her period. In preparation of such expectation, sex is prohibited on that day or night and she will do a Bedikah to doublecheck.

Some women have a very scheduled regular period. They can get it on the 23rd of each Hebrew month, or in a sequence of every 28 days. When a woman has a steady schedule determined by three times having the same sequence, then her Yom Ha'Veset is determined by that schedule. From that point on, when the day or night comes where she expects her period, she is forbidden on that day or night from having sex with her husband. The concept is to be aware that she should be expecting her period in that day or night.

Additionally, she must do a bedikah in that timeframe, however, if she forgets the bedikah, it is fine, and she is still permitted to her husband as normal.

A scheduled Veset gets unscheduled if three cycles pass and the routine is broken. Then she becomes like everyone else.

If that day or night passes and she is not yet a Niddah, then she is completely permitted to her husband. No need to add any restrictions here. Everything is back to normal.

During the Yom Ha'Veset, even though sex is prohibited, the Harchakot, rules of separation, do not apply.

Now, if a person does not have a steady scheduled period of three cycles, then they would have to deal with two Yom Ha'Vessets.

One of these two dates are Yom Hachodesh, which is the same day of the Hebrew month that she had her period last time. So, if she got her period on the night of 3 Tishrey, then her Yom

HaChodesh is the night of 3 Cheshvon.

I recommend you get a Jewish calendar to use just to track your periods. Put in the day of your period and specify if it was day or night.

The second Yom Ha'Vesset would be Yom HaHaflagah, which is the space in days between the last two periods. So, if the last two periods were 32 days apart, then you count 32 days from the most recent period and that is your Yom Ha'Haflagah.

If the last two periods were not both in the daytime or both in the nighttime, then you can skip yom Ha'Haflagah completely.

Let's review that now and try to simplify it.

A woman with a regular scheduled period has her Yom Ha'Vesset on the day she expects it next. If she always has 28 days, then her Yom Ha'Vesset is on each 28th day. If she always has it on a specific day of the month, then that day of the month is her Yom Ha'Vesset.

A woman without an exact scheduled period has to keep two Yom Ha'Vessets. One is the same day of the month, and the other is the same number of days between the last two periods.

Day and night are separate here. The Yom Ha'vesset is only either day or night. Additionally, the calculations don't count if one was day and the next was night.

It takes time to get used to this, but it isn't as confusing as it may seem. It takes a bit of practice.

Staining

If she finds a blood stain on her clothing and the color of the clothing is white, she may become a Niddah. If the color of the clothing is any other color, she is not a Niddah, even if the stain is large.

If the clothing is white and the stain is larger than a U.S. nickel coin, then she becomes a Niddah. That entire stain must be continuous. You would not count a broken-up stain and then add up all the parts. The full nickel must be red.

If the stain is on a maxi pad or a panty liner, even though it is white, it would not be a problem. The reason for this is, because it is not an article of clothing and therefore it does not accept Tumaah.

It is therefore suggested that during the time that she is not a Niddah, she should wear underwear of any other color other than white, and during when she is a Niddah, she again should wear colored underwear, but she should wear a white pad of any sort. Thus, it will be improbable for her to ever have a stain that is a problem.

Seeing blood in the toilet, is not a problem in itself. Please don't look in the toilet to see if there's blood.

Seeing blood at or after an internal examination at the Doctor can be resolved easily by asking the Doctor "is this blood from my period?" He will most probably say no, and you can ignore that bleeding completely.

Ask the Rabbi

You may need to show stains or Bedikahs to a Rabbi in the beginning of marriage, but you should learn quickly on your own. Let me be clear, there is no requirement to bring stains to a Rabbi, and many people feel violated by this practice. That's your choice. If you follow the advice here, you wouldn't need to. Often the ones coming to the Rabbi daily are based in anxiety, as the question is not really a question.

Bedikahs are pretty cut and dry. If there's red there, you have a problem. Usually, the ones that they bring to Rabbis are pink, or brown. Again, it's your option. I highly recommend that you figure it out on your own as soon as possible.

Of course, periodically, you may have an actual valid question that needs a Rabbi to decide. In that case, call the Rabbi first. Usually, it can be resolved over the phone after asking a few pointed questions.

Unfortunately, this idea of bringing these intimate issues to a Rabbi turns many people off. That's why I discourage it. I would rather you were able to keep the Halachot without having to feel uncomfortable. It's really not a required part of the process.

The Mikveh/Mikvah

The Mikveh is literally a body of water. The ocean is fine, a lake is fine. A flowing river may be a problem. Of course, there are designated Mikvaot, that are like small swimming pools. The size is important. It needs to fit a full-sized person completely immersed in water.

A swimming pool would work and even a large jacuzzi. The only issue would be the source of the water. The water cannot be brought into the pool with pails or even portable tanks. A typical community Mikveh is filled with straight rainwater initially. You can also fill it up with piped water, and even with an attached garden hose. Almost all swimming pools are filled with piped water, and are therefore fine.

There's no requirement to go to a community Mikveh. There's no requirement to have a Mikvah Lady watch over you and complain about your nails.

You want to make sure that your entire body including all your hair ends up completely immersed at once. If it's a deep enough pool or lake, that's easy. If not, bring a friend, or even your husband.

There's no need to go into the Mikveh completely naked. You can wear a normal fitting bathing suit. You can even go completely clothed, as long as nothing is excessively tight to your body.

Chatzitza (Blockage)

Chatzitza is a problem when going to the Mikveh. When you immerse in the Mikveh, you need to remove all blockages or obstructions. That means anything that might cause the water not to reach certain parts of your body. For example, if you have mud or dirt on your hand, or you have a rubber band in your hair, then certain areas of your body were blocked from the water. That's a problem.

If this blockage is something that doesn't bother you, then it's not a problem. You should take a shower or bath at home beforehand, or at the Mikveh itself, you clean yourself thoroughly, and brush your teeth, then you're good to go into the Mikveh. Do not floss. Too many people got floss stuck in their teeth and ended up in emergency dental cleaning. Dental floss stuck in your teeth would be a blockage.

If your nails are not in good shape, then cut them, clean them, and make them look nice; both fingers and toes. You can even put nail polish on. As we said earlier, it's only a blockage if it bothers you. Messy ruined nails and messy nail polish will bother you and is considered a blockage. A nicely manicured hand will be the opposite, and is therefore perfectly fine.

As we said earlier, you can immerse in clothing. That works on the same principal. Clothing is not a blockage, as it does not bother you. It isn't dirt or something like that.

It is important not to develop OCD in this area. If you feel clean enough to go out in public, then you're all set. Don't forget to take out anything from your hair.

Immersion

The requirement and the custom by Sephardim is to go into the water and before you go under you say the blessing. You only need to immerse one full time, making sure that your entire body, including your hair is completely underwater at one time. Then you come out and you're done.

Most Ashkenazim immerse completely first, then stick their heads out and say the blessing, and then immerse again. That's fine too, although not required.

The Blessing that is said is as follows:

BARUCH ATAH ADONAY ELOHENU MELECH HA'OLAM
ASHER KIDISHANU B'MITZVOTAV VETZIVANU AL
HA'TEVILAH.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר

קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל הַטְּבִילָה

Going to the Mikveh before dark

If a woman would like to go to the Mikveh earlier in the day, on that seventh clean day, it would be okay, if her husband is not home and won't come home till after dark.

Rules Pertaining to Sex

Many ancient cultures have all types of culturally based restrictions when it comes to sex. Judaism, unfortunately, has its share of this. Jewish law, Halachah, is one thing, culture and customs are something completely different. We should be following the letter of the law and not adding restrictions unnecessarily. Many Rabbis have suggested all kinds of restrictions as a Midat Chassidut, which means extra credits designated for special holy Rabbis. This is not to be even thought about by us regular people.

There are some Rabbis that instruct their followers or students to only have sex Friday night, in the pitch dark, in missionary position, and get it over with really quickly. That is sad and not in line with Jewish Law.

The Halachah is like the Rambam who says it very clearly. I encourage you to read it inside. (Hilchot Isurei Biah 21:9)

אִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מִתְּרַתּוֹ הִיא לוֹ. לְפִיכָךְ כָּל מֵה שֶׁאָדָם רוֹצֵה לַעֲשׂוֹת
בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ עוֹשֶׂה

“A woman is permitted to her husband. Therefore, all that he wants to do together with her, they can do.”

Oral sex, anal sex, and different positions are all permitted. Anytime, day or night. There are certain restrictions though. Ideally, the ejaculation should be exclusively in the vagina. However, in the heat of the moment, it isn't always an exact science. There are enough Rabbinical opinions that would allow

it otherwise. Do the best you can without getting caught in perfectionism.

Sex is an important part of a relationship and I encourage you to give it its full respect.

Birth Control

Jewish Law allows for birth control within reason. There's a Mitzvah in the Torah to have children. The Halachah requires one boy and one girl. Of course, we do the best that we can, as we are not fully in control of that. Having too many children, or having children when a couple is not ready for it, can be a problem on many levels.

Rabbis will often permit a couple to use birth control, such as pills, a diaphragm, an IUD, etc. Using a condom is a problem though.

It is common to allow birth control during the first year or two of the marriage, until the couple is ready. Then between children to leave some space and recuperate. After having a boy and a girl, most Rabbis are very lenient, as you officially fulfilled the Mitzvah.

I have given you the basic concepts here, but ideally you should speak to a Rabbi that you respect, because each couple is different and each situation is different.

A Bride

A bride who is a virgin will normally become a Niddah, automatically after the first night of intercourse. The way around that is as follows:

At a visit to the gynecologist, she should ask him if she still has her virginity, if not, then the issue is resolved.

If yes, then ask if she might bleed if she has intercourse. The Doctor will say it is possible. Now we were able to determine that if there's blood, it's not from a period. She is now completely permitted to be with her husband without becoming a Niddah.

It's a simple fix and avoids a very annoying, if not torturous two weeks.

When you schedule a wedding date, you can ask your doctor to prescribe birth control pills and schedule your period in a way that you're able to go to the Mikveh before the wedding day.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

When a woman is pregnant, she stops getting her period. She should be able to go through the entire nine months without becoming a Niddah.

There would be no need for Bedikahs, Yom Ha'Vesset, and so on. All these get cancelled until she starts getting her menstrual cycle again.

Some women do stain, however. Avoid having issues with that, by wearing any other color underwear other than white, and/or a panty-liner or pad. These can be white.

At Childbirth, the woman will see blood and then she is a Niddah. If she did not yet see blood, but the contractions are two or three minutes apart, she is a Niddah.

Technically, you cannot pass the baby to each other directly. Please don't put the baby on the floor or on the kitchen table. The baby's safety is more important than this Gezera. You will see that it is easy to get used to. You put the baby in its crib, baby seat, the bed or a bassinet, and then the other lifts it right up.

Once the baby is born, it takes a while to stop bleeding and be able to be clean enough to make it through seven clean days.

There's a special time of Tumaah for a mother of a newborn baby. It's seven days for a boy, and fourteen days for a girl, starting from and including the day of the birth. The woman cannot immerse in the Mikveh until after that time. It's seldom an issue, as it usually takes longer to be capable of getting the Seven Clean Days.

It is highly recommended at least at the first several cycles after a birth, to keep the bedikahs down to the bare minimum.

A nursing mother will often not get her period at all. Some will get them irregularly. The Halachot will begin to apply accordingly.

Menopause

During menopause the menstrual cycle will usually change. Someone with a fixed steady Yom Ha'Vesset will have that cancelled after three times of a different cycle.

Eventually, her menstrual cycle will end completely. If there's no blood anymore, all these Halachot are no longer applicable, as long as she went into a Mikveh after her last period.

Conclusion

Now you know all that you need to know about Hilchot Niddah. You will get it into a routine over time and it should become relatively simple. Going to Niddah classes and speeches will usually be counterproductive, as they confuse you more. If you feel you need more understanding of some of the concepts, ask someone to help you with those specific items.

As opposed to many other religions and cultures, sex is not dirty, and a Niddah is not dirty. The laws are in place in order to make her Tahor for the spirituality and holiness of the marital relations.

