

Introduction to Tractate Niddah

Scripture is explicit that sexual relations may not take place during the menstrual period (Lev. 15: 1–33). When it comes to menstrual uncleanness the main problem comes at the start of the period. In the clean or “Zibah-days” (when any blood that is excreted is classified as *zob*), the woman may have sexual relations without scruple; as soon as the menstrual cycle commences, however, a single drop of blood marks the change in her status to that of a menstruant. The law of *Niddah* addresses how to deal with cases of unclarity as to the exact point at which the period has begun, with special reference to the status of the man who is engaged in sexual relations with the woman at that moment. It is that interstitial period that defines the topic of the law of *Niddah*.

- I. Retroactive contamination
- II. Unclean excretions
 - A. Unclean blood
 - B. The status of abortions as to uncleanness
 - C. Samaritan, Sadducee, and Gentile women
 - D. The status of blood produced in labor
 - E. Status of blood in the Zibah-period
 - F. The Point at which unclean fluid imparts uncleanness
- III. Rules applicable at various ages
- IV. Doubts in connection with unclean excretions
 - A. Bloodstains and other matters subject to doubt
 - B. Blood of menstruating women, the flesh of a corpse impact uncleanness whether wet or dry, the Zab’s only when wet
 - C. Doubts about the dead creeping thing, the bloodstain
 - D. Bloodstains [doubtfully-unclean blood] of Israelites, Gentiles, and Samaritans
 - E. Doubts about bloodstains and drops of blood
 - F. The fixed period
- V. Concluding miscellanies
 - A. Doubts about cleanness when one has failed to examine herself
 - B. Uncleanness of the Zab, of the menstruating woman
 - C. Status of a woman in the period of purifying after childbirth
 - D. She who produces blood on the eleventh day of the Zibah-period

Tractate *Niddah* sets forth law on the uncleanness of certain vaginal flows and on cases of doubt in connection with that same matter. These fluids are menstrual blood, the abortion, and the like. The women are classified as to whether they are Israelite, Samaritan, Sadducean, and so on. The animate source of uncleanness—in this case, the woman—

must take precautions to ascertain her status, and the net effect of the law is to require the woman to pay close attention to the condition of her vagina. The woman who has a fixed period still has to examine herself in the morning, at twilight, and before having sexual relations. These requirements impose considerations of cultic cleanness on a variety of homely situations. A man concerned with seminal emission, by contrast, is discouraged from doing the same, but if his motive is to look out for flux, he is praised as well. While considerations of eating priestly rations in the state of cultic cleanness register, the premise of the law throughout addresses the home of an ordinary Israelite. If a drop of blood is found on the man's cloth, the man is assumed to have had sexual relations with a menstruating woman; so too, if blood is found on her clothing at the time of intercourse. If blood is found on her clothing later on, the matter is not certain. The result is that sexual relations are subject to considerations of cultic cleanness, even when the prevailing assumption is that both parties are cultically clean for the act.