



A dip in the dark

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Source 1: Genesis 2 בראשית ב

כג וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִפְעִים עִצְם מֵעֲצָמַי וּבָשָׂר מִבְּשָׂרִי לָזֶאת יִקְרָא
אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ זֹאת: כד עַל־כֵּן יַעֲזֹב אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ
וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד:

23. The man said: This is the one, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, let her be called woman, because she was taken from man.

24. Thus a man leaves his father and his mother, and he cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Source 2: Leviticus 15 ויקרא טו

יט וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־תִהְיֶה זֹבַה דָּם יִהְיֶה זֹבַה בְּבִשְׂרָהּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדְתָּהּ ...

19. If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge of her flesh is blood, she will be seven days in her *nidah*

כה וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־יִזְוֹבׁ זֹב דָּמָה יָמִים רַבִּים בְּלֹא עֵת־נִדְתָּהּ אִו כִּי־תִזְוֹב
עַל־נִדְתָּהּ כָּל־יָמֶי זֹב טִמְאַתָּה כִּי־יָמֵי נִדְתָּהּ תִּהְיֶה טִמְאָה הִוא:

25. If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not in the time of her *nidah*, or if it runs beyond the time of her *nidah*, then all the days that she is *temeiah* because of this discharge will be as the days of her *nidah*, she will be *temeiah*.

כח וְאִם־טָהַרָה מִזֹּבָה וְסָפְרָה־לָּהּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְאַחַר תִּטְהַר:

28. But if she ceases to discharge, she counts to herself seven days, and after that she may become *tehorah*.

Source 3: Leviticus 12 ויקרא יב

... אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיִּלְדָּה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים כִּי־יֵמִי נִדַּת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא: ג וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בָּשָׂר עָרְלָתוֹ:

2.... A woman, if she gives birth, and the child is male, she will be *temeiah* for seven days as in her usual *nidah* time. 3. On the eighth day, you will circumcise his flesh.

ד וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדַמֵּי טַהֲרָה בְּכָל־קֹדֶשׁ לֹא־תִגַּע וְאֶל־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תִבֹּא עַד־מְלֵאת יָמֵי טַהֲרָה: ה וְאִם־נִקְבָּה תִלְד׃ וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַעַיִם כְּנֹדְתָהּ וּשְׁשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב עַל־דַּמֵּי טַהֲרָה:

4. For thirty three days she will sit in the blood of her purification and will not touch holy things or approach the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are over. 5. If she has a female child, then she will be *temeiah* for fourteen days, and she will sit in the blood of her purification for sixty six days.

Source 4: Leviticus 18 ויקרא יח

יִטּוּ וְאֶל-אִשָּׁה בְּנִדַּת טְמֵאָתָהּ לֹא תִקְרָב לְגִלּוֹת עֲרוֹתָהּ:

19. Because all who do these abominations, their souls will be cut off from their people.

כֹּט כִּי כָל-אִשָּׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מִכֹּל הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְרְתוּ הַנְּפֹשׁוֹת הַעֹשִׂים
מִקְרָב עַמָּם:

29. And do not approach a woman in the *nidah* of her *tum'ah*, to uncover her nakedness.

Practice of Counting Seven Clean Days

In Talmudic times, the distinction between *niddah* and *zavah* disappeared as it is difficult to distinguish between them.

Source 5: Talmud Brachot 31a ברכות לא.א

בנות ישראל החמירו על עצמן, שאפילו רואות טיפת דם
כחרדל - יושבות עליה שבעה נקיים.

The Israelite women were stringent upon themselves so that even if they see one drop of blood the size of a mustard seed, they wait seven clean days after it.

Result:

Women always count seven clean days, even after normal menstruation.

The Five Day Minimum

adapted from <http://www.yoetzet.org/article.php?id=35>

A woman must wait five days from the time she becomes niddah until she can begin counting the seven blood-free days.

She counts the day on which she became niddah as the first of these five days, and then counts four full days which last from sunset to sunset.

Example:

- Sunday (day 1): niddah commences (Sunday includes Saturday night)
- Thursday (day 5): *hefsek taharah* is performed
- Friday Thursday : seven clean days
- Thursday-week: mikveh night

Halachic Reason for Five Day Minimum:

Women commonly expel semen for a few days after intercourse.

A day on which this occurs cannot be counted as one of the seven blood-free days. (Semen is a kind of flow, akin to menstruation.)

A woman who is unaware that she has expelled semen may mistakenly count the cancelled day and immerse in the mikveh too early.

Because such an immersion would be invalid, she might unknowingly violate the laws of *niddah*.

Life-span of a sperm

From an halachic standpoint, semen is considered viable for 72 hours, after which it has no further halachic significance.

Therefore, to be certain there can be no seminal expulsion during the seven blood-free days, at least 72 hours must elapse from the time a woman has intercourse until she begins to count.

Moreover, since the 72 hours may begin in the middle of one calendar day and extend to the middle of the fourth day, she cannot start to count the seven blood-free days until the fifth day.

Example:

Saturday night / Sunday daytime: sex

Some time later on Sunday: menstruation starts (day1)

Wednesday afternoon: 72 hours have passed after menstruation commenced (day 4)

Result:

Some Sephardic authorities permit women to begin the seven blood-free days on the fifth day (not the sixth, as above).

By this ruling, in the above example, the hefsek taharah would take place on Wednesday afternoon.

Problem:

What if you had sex at 4pm on Sunday and did the hefsek taharah before 4pm on Wednesday?

What if you thought it was Sunday afternoon when you had sex but really it was Sunday night?

Result:

Sperm still there Wednesday afternoon so hefsek taharah is invalid

Result:

Seven pure days are invalid.

Result:

Your trip to the mikveh did not count and you are still nidah.

Solution:

Make it five days to be safe.

This is the practice in most communities and among Ashkenazim

But rabbis have room to be lenient.

Four days still applies for hymenal bleeding (wedding night).

In cases of infertility, rabbis will often allow four days.

If four day rule is used, you have to be more careful.

Source 6: Talmud Brachot 22a ברכות כב.א

אין דברי תורה מקבלין טומאה.

Words of Torah are not susceptible of *tum'ah*.

nidah -- woman who is tamei from a normal menstrual flow

zav / *zavah* -- man or woman who is tamei from an irregular but naturally occurring sexual flow

ba'al kerī -- man who is tamei from spilling his seed deliberately

Ezra made a law that a *ba'al kerī* could not study Torah in order to discourage this behaviour, but this restriction was lifted in Talmudic times by Rabbi Y^ehuda ben B^eteira because it contradicts source 5. In the Talmud, such a restriction is never applied to a *nidah* or *zav* / *zavah*.

Text Warning: ‘Baraita’ de Masechet Nidah

This text is not actually a baraita and is the source that is used by those with extreme views restricting prayer and learning for a *nidah*. It is probably the source of the misguided view of some women that they should not come to a synagogue if they are *nidah*.

This text is not a valid halachic source and some scholars think it originated in a heretical sect.

The 'baraita' actually dates from at least 7th century (long after the Talmud), around the same time that Islam was gaining force.

In Islam, menstruating women are prohibited from entering a mosque, unlike in Judaism, where there is no such rule.

Resources

<http://www.yoatzot.org>

The Secret of Jewish Femininity: Insights into the Practice of Taharat HaMishpachah, by Tehilla Abramov.

The Waters of Eden, by Aryeh Kaplan.

A Hedge of Roses: Jewish Insights into Marriage and Married Life, by Norman Namm.

<http://www.jofa.org/social.php/ritual/synagogue/carryingtora>