

# Family purity and the law of Niddah

What is this law of Niddah, as it is often referred to, and how are we to understand it? Why is it even important?

We shall share the Scriptural truth about these and related commandments with you. This is a sensitive and mature topic, but very important for every married couple to know. Furthermore, young people planning to get married also need to learn this in order to apply it from the beginning of their marriage.

Some of these commandments carry with it severe punishment if not adhered to. However, it is often, either neglected, or added to. We will focus on what YHVH teaches us in His word, in order for you to have discernment when you are presented with falsehood.

## The laws of Niddah

### What is Niddah?

The word translated as “menstrual impurity” in [Leviticus 15:19](#) is “niddah” in Hebrew and it is from this, that the term “the law of niddah” was deduced. It is also known as the time of separation.

*(niddâ). Filthiness, menstruous, put apart, separation, set apart, unclean thing. (RSV translates “pollutions” in Ezra 9:11 and “filthy thing” in Lam 1:17; ASV “filthy thing” in Lam 1:17.)*

*Derived from nādad by BDB but from nādâ by KB. In the legal literature the word is used primarily to describe the ritual uncleanness incurred by women during menstruation or childbirth, two functions generally associated with impurity incurred from bodily discharges or secretions (Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19–20, 26).*

*Everything on which a menstruous women might lie or sit was pronounced ritually unclean (niddâ). The impurity defined by this word also extended to abnormal menstruation such as prolonged or irregular periods (Lev 15:25, 33).<sup>1</sup>*

From this definition, we learn that being in a state of Niddah is directly connected with a woman’s menses, or to blood flow due to a physiological problem or after childbirth. The woman, or the time period is sometimes referred to as “Niddah” and the commandments about it are referred to as the law of Niddah. This period marks a time of separation, which will differ in accordance with the reason for the flow of blood. We shall now study this in more detail.

### A woman with a discharge

We are given very clear instructions on the topic of a menstruous woman. This first instruction refers to the normal monthly cycle of a woman.

#### Leviticus 15:19–24

<sup>19</sup> ‘When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue

in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.<sup>20</sup> ‘Everything also on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean, and everything on which she sits shall be unclean.’<sup>21</sup> ‘Anyone who touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.’<sup>22</sup> ‘Whoever touches any thing on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.’<sup>23</sup> ‘Whether it be on the bed or on the thing on which she is sitting, when he touches it, he shall be unclean until evening.’<sup>24</sup> ‘If a man actually lies with her so that her menstrual impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.’

So what do we learn from this passage in Leviticus?

This instruction is two faceted: it is about ritual uncleanness and about abstaining from marital relations. This is important to remember, you would understand when you continue to read.

- It is about a normal monthly menstrual cycle
- The period of separation is 7 days. This seven days are counted from the onset of menstruation until the end of the seventh day. However, if her menses continues for more than seven days, the period of separation changes.
- Being in this state leads to uncleanness – ritual impurity. It means that this woman and anybody who comes in contact with her or with anything she touched, will be ritually unclean until sundown. When the new day starts, they will be clean.
- Take note of verse 24. According to Barnes’ notes on the Bible, this must refer to an unexpected occurrence as **intercourse during this period is strictly forbidden.**  
<http://bible.cc/leviticus/15-24.htm>.
- There is no mention of the necessity of a mikvah (ritual bath) to cleanse after having been in this state. The woman is cleansed by means of time passage.

Just some clarification here: Jewish halacha prescribes that a husband and his wife are to sleep in separate beds and are, in very strict communities, not even allowed to touch each other. They also teach that a woman is to count seven clean days after her last day of menses, the minimum allowed time of separation being 12 days. **This is not Scriptural!** You will understand when you continue reading...

### Woman with a discharge beyond 7 days

Sometimes a woman may experience menses extending beyond seven days or bloodflow related to other conditions. What then? We have special instructions when this occurs.

#### Leviticus 15:25–30

<sup>25</sup> ‘Now if a woman has a discharge of her blood many days, not at the period of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond that period, all the days of her impure discharge she shall continue as though in her menstrual impurity; she is unclean.’<sup>26</sup> ‘Any bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her like her bed at menstruation; and every thing on which she sits shall be unclean, like her uncleanness at that time.’<sup>27</sup> ‘Likewise, whoever touches them shall be unclean and shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening.’<sup>28</sup> ‘When she becomes clean from her discharge, she shall count off for herself seven days; and afterward she will be clean.’<sup>29</sup>

‘Then on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons and bring them in to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting.<sup>30</sup> ‘The priest shall offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before YHVH because of her impure discharge.’

The instructions are for the most part the same as for a normal menstrual cycle. However, for women who have a cycle longer than seven days, this would apply. She is to count **seven clean days from the first clean day**. After this seventh clean day, she will be clean and can resume relations with her husband. This period of separation will be determined by the period of blood flow plus seven clean days.

## The Laws of Motherhood

There are specific commandments given regarding after a woman has given birth. These also have to do with ritual purity.

### Leviticus 12:1–8

<sup>1</sup> Then YHVH spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: ‘When a woman gives birth and bears a male *child*, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. <sup>3</sup> ‘On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup> ‘Then she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. <sup>5</sup> ‘But if she bears a female *child*, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of *her* purification for sixty-six days. <sup>6</sup> ‘When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup> ‘Then he shall offer it before YHVH and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears *a child, whether a male or a female*. <sup>8</sup> ‘But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.’ ”

Giving birth to a male child will result in a period of purification of forty days and for a female child a total of eighty days. After the time of purification was completed, the woman is commanded to bring a sin offering. Why was it necessary to make a sin offering?

*12:6–8. Having a baby was not a sin but instead was the fulfillment of a divine*

*command (Gen. 1:28). Thus the need of a sin offering ... to make atonement was only a matter of ritual purification. In order to be pronounced ceremonially clean (12:7), the new mother offered a*

*year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering (v. 6). If she was a poor person, she brought two birds, one each for a burnt offering and a sin offering. Mary, the mother of Y'shua, qualified for this concession (Luke 2:22–24).<sup>2</sup>*

This commandment had to do with ritual purity. Are we still to observe this, seeing that there is no Temple or tabernacle? And if yes, to what extent? We believe that we still need to observe this and here is the explanation.

## **Marital relations and Niddah**

When you read the above passages in isolation, you may conclude that it is only about ritual purity and thus not important to us, due to the absence of the Temple. However, we were given some more instructions on this topic. The following commandment was given with the list of most forbidden sexual relationships, such as adultery and incest. We can therefore not just categorize it as an issue of clean and unclean.

### Leviticus 18:19

<sup>19</sup> ‘Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity.

### Leviticus 20:18

<sup>18</sup> ‘If *there is* a man who lies with a menstruous woman and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow, and she has exposed the flow of her blood; thus both of them shall be cut off from among their people.

To uncover the nakedness of a woman means to have intercourse with her. It is strictly forbidden by YHVH to have sexual relations during the time of a woman's menstruation. The punishment being “*to be cut off from among your people,*” this means to be excluded from the covenant. It can also mean the denial of an afterlife or the end of your family line. It is not the purpose of this article to explore this concept further. Maybe at another time. The point is, that it is a serious offence. An offence against YHVH, that can only be rectified by sincere repentance.

## Three reasons to observe the law of Niddah

### 1. YHVH commanded it!

We do not need a reason other than that YHVH commanded us to do so. However it is just to show you that YHVH gives us instructions with our well-being in mind, not to burden us.

### 2. The blessing of Niddah

There is another reason for keeping the law of Niddah. When you observe the law of Niddah, it gives you and your husband or wife a change to spend time together on another level. It is good to spend time talking, it builds your relationship and makes it stronger and the added blessing is in the waiting...

### 3. Niddah and cervical cancer

There is also a physical reason... There is a theory that there seems to be a correlation between couples adhering to the laws of Niddah and a lower prevalence of cervical cancer. Here is an excerpt from an article giving a possible explanation for this.

This is only an excerpt; the entire article can be read at the link below listed under references.

*The next piece of information that I came across was in regard to the possibility of sexual relations during the menstrual flow or shortly thereafter, being a causitive factor of cervical cancer. As I read this I could hardly believe what I was reading. The neck or immediate opening of the womb, moves and retracts during the menstrual cycle. No small wonder that I found intercourse during full blood flow, or whilst the menstrual cycle was tailing off, with the usual "cleaning out" mucus, not only of much discomfort, but after ejaculation quite a painful, stinging sensation.*

*Articles on the Internet explain the slight movement, and thinning of the neck of the womb, mostly in reference to the facilitation and readiness for conception, and sexual relations. So I know that aspect of the article I had read years before is correct. However, it is so many years ago, I can no longer remember the title of that article, or from whence I obtained it. This article was written concerning the aspect of women and cervical cancer. It described how the neck of the womb actually extended during the monthly cycle and its retraction. That it softened during mid month in readiness for conception, and that as menses ended it was again contracted and somewhat harder. The point of the article was a warning NOT to have sexual relations too early after the major blood flow ceased. Especially as this area of the neck of the womb was still not fully retracted. It was the opinion of the writer of this medical paper that such exposure to the male bodily fluids, too early, prior to full retraction of the neck of the womb, was put forward as a factor in causing cervical cancers in women.*

*The article went on to state certain statistics that the women having the least incidence of cancer of the cervix were as follows: 1. Virgins. 2. Nuns. 3. Jewish Women. 4. Monogamous married women. .... and so and so forth down to the poor women who use their bodies in what is euphemistically called "the sex trade."<sup>3</sup>*

*In the article entitled The low Incidence of Cervical Cancer in Jewish Women: Has the Puzzle Finally Been solved? Joseph Menczer MD; from THE ISRAEL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION JOURNAL, Volume 5: Pages 120-123, and I quote these paragraphs as follows:- "Cervical carcinoma is one of the most common gynaecologic malignant tumours worldwide and a leading cause of death from genital malignancies in women. One of the most important epidemiologic observations concerning this neoplasm is that the disease is practically non-existent in celibate populations. This was first noticed in the 19th century by Rigonni-Serrn of Verona, Italy regarding Catholic nuns, who are sexually inactive. Gagnon of Quebec subsequently confirmed this observation. He served as a gynaecologist in a few Quebec nunneries for several years, and it occurred to him that he had never seen a case of cancer of the cervix in a nun. Among 13,000 deaths of nuns, 12 were recorded as due to corpus cancer. If the same ratio of cervix to corpus cancer exists among nuns as among the general population, there should have been 5 to 8 times as many cervical cancers. instead there was none. These observations and the subsequent identification of risk factors led to the conclusion that cervical cancer is associated with coitus, and that it shares many characteristics with communicable diseases which follow a venereal mode of transmission. These findings led eventually to the identification towards the end of the 20th century of the human papilloma virus and its major etiologic role in this neoplasm.*

*A potentially similarly important observation was published by Braithwaite in The Lancet in 1901. Referring to the experience with cancer of the cervix at the Leeds General Infirmary and at the London Hospital, he stated that it "was seldom or never met with amongst the numerous Jewesses" attending these institutions. Although the low incidence among Jewish women has been repeatedly confirmed since then, the reason for it has intrigued and eluded many investigators. ....*

### ***Abstinence from intercourse***

*Among orthodox Jewish women who observe the laws of Niddah, cervical cancer is even less common than in the rest of Israeli Jewish women. This observation seems to support the notion that abstinence from intercourse during and for several days after menses is a protective factor. .... [ Underlining added]*

### ***Conclusions***

*For many years it was predicted, on the basis of observations in selected cohorts or individual institutions, that the incidence of invasive cervical carcinoma in Israeli Jewish women will increase. While ritual circumcision [of the male child - at 8 days, as previously stated in this article] is still practiced widely, today only a minority of Jewish women observes the laws of Niddah. Sexual habits have also changed considerably, becoming far less stringent. In spite of these trends of the last four to five decades, the population-based incidence of cervical cancer in Israeli Jewish women has not increased and remains very low.*

*Braithwaite, who first noted the low incidence in Jewish women in 1901, suggested two explanations for this "immunity." First was the difference of race, and the second the difference in diet, namely the "absence of bacon and ham in the diet of Jews." He then added: "The latter is far more probable than the former, although there may be*

*something in race.” Now, a century after Braithwaite’s original observation, it seems that there may indeed be something in “race.”*

*Evidently it was known, in modern times, as far back as the turn of the 20th century, that obeying the law of Niddah was a factor in cervical cancer being less common in Jewish women. Now we have entered the 21st century, and it is over 100 years since these observations were made. Is this information being spoken of today? Taught today? Are women still falling victim to cervical cancer today? The following article gives further information regarding the high protein content of sperm in some men as a possible cause of cervical cancer. Once again if Yehovah’s laws were observed it is not only possible, but probable that cervical cancer in women in the general population to reduce to the same level as those figures for the Jewish community.<sup>4</sup>*

As we said before, we do not need physical explanations as to why we need to be obedient to YHVH’s commandments. We are to hear and do because of our love for Him and because He said so!

## **A spiritual lesson from the law of Niddah**

The state of niddah is not sin. It is a normal bodily function created by YHVH. However, it does cause a separation for a time. This separation is, in Scripture, used in a metaphorical way to describe Israel when they are in sin. Sin causes separation between us and YHVH in the same way a woman’s monthly cycle causes separation between her and her husband. This separation removes intimacy in the same way sin removes intimacy with our Heavenly Father. Have you experienced this separation when you have sinned? It usually is the first sign for me that I am doing something wrong. Only through repentance can this intimacy with our Father YHVH be restored.

There are some other commandments relating to family purity and we would like to include it here. The first is about the seminal emission of a man.

## **Seminal emission**

### Leviticus 15:16–18

<sup>16</sup> ‘Now if a man has a seminal emission, he shall bathe all his body in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>17</sup> ‘As for any garment or any leather on which there is seminal emission, it shall be washed with water and be unclean until evening. <sup>18</sup> ‘If a man lies with a woman *so that* there is a seminal emission, they shall both bathe in water and be unclean until evening.

The word used for seminal emission is “zera” and refers to a normal seminal emission, either during relations or otherwise.

2446 זֶרַע (zě·ră‘): *n.masc.*; ≡ Str 2233; TWOT 582a—1. LN 3.35 *seed, i.e., a kernel part of a plant that propagates the species (Ge 1:11)*; 2. LN 8.70–8.77 *semen, i.e., the product of the male genitals (Lev 15:16)*; 3. LN 9.41–9.45 *child, i.e., one that is the direct offspring (Ge 15:3)*; 4. LN 10.14–10.48 *offspring, descendant, posterity, i.e., one that is related more than one generation removed (Ge 3:15)*; 5. LN 11.90–11.95 *family, clan, i.e., an extended family group based on a common ancestor (Ge 19:32, 34)*; 6. LN 11.12–11.54 *race, i.e., a*

*very extended family line based on many different criteria, with a focus on religious ties (Ezr 9:2); 7. LN 67.163–67.200 unit: זִי' (yôm)*<sup>5</sup>

Take note here that there are two parts to this instruction. The first is to wash, and the second part is about being unclean until evening. The man and the woman are both to bathe in water and everything on which seminal emission is, must be washed. The instruction to wash does not cause them to be clean, but that in combination with the passing of time. They shall be unclean until evening. We, therefore, believe that bathing and washing of garments, and anything that came in contact with seminal fluid, is still required.

## A man with a discharge

The next passage deals with a man with a discharge.

### Leviticus 15:2–15

<sup>2</sup> “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. <sup>3</sup> ‘This, moreover, shall be his uncleanness in his discharge: it is his uncleanness whether his body allows its discharge to flow or whether his body obstructs its discharge. <sup>4</sup> ‘Every bed on which the person with the discharge lies becomes unclean, and everything on which he sits becomes unclean. <sup>5</sup> ‘Anyone, moreover, who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening; <sup>6</sup> and whoever sits on the thing on which the man with the discharge has been sitting, shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>7</sup> ‘Also whoever touches the person with the discharge shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>8</sup> ‘Or if the man with the discharge spits on one who is clean, he too shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>9</sup> ‘Every saddle on which the person with the discharge rides becomes unclean. <sup>10</sup> ‘Whoever then touches any of the things which were under him shall be unclean until evening, and he who carries them shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>11</sup> ‘Likewise, whomever the one with the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe in water and be unclean until evening. <sup>12</sup> ‘However, an earthenware vessel which the person with the discharge touches shall be broken, and every wooden vessel shall be rinsed in water. <sup>13</sup> ‘Now when the man with the discharge becomes cleansed from his discharge, then he shall count off for himself seven days for his cleansing; he shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in running water and will become clean. <sup>14</sup> ‘Then on the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the Lord to the doorway of the tent of meeting and give them to the priest; <sup>15</sup> and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before YHVH because of his discharge.

This” *discharge*” is most probably due to an infection.

2308 זִי' (zôb): *n.masc.*; ≡ Str 2101; TWOT 534a—LN 23.142–23.184 *body fluid discharge, i.e., an issue of fluid from human adult genitals, male or female, note: in the female as part of the normal menstrual discharge, the male discharge often taken as related to a disease, the clap, Gonorrhoea benigna (Lev 15:2–33 passim+)*<sup>5</sup>

We find, once again, the instruction to wash anything that came into contact with this discharge or with the man who has it. One of the reasons for washing would be to prevent the spread of infection.

Once again, we see how YHVH has our best interest at heart when He gave us His commandments. It is for our good!

#### Deuteronomy 10:12–13

<sup>12</sup> “Now, Israel, what does YHVH your Elohim require from you, but to fear YHVH your Elohim, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve YHVH your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> **and to keep YHVH’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?**

To keep YHVH’s commandment is to choose life in more than one way, physically and spiritually!

#### Deuteronomy 30:19

<sup>19</sup> “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So **choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,**

### **Further implications of uncleanness**

When we use public transport or go to public places, for example, we may sit on a chair a menstruous woman, or a man who is having a discharge, sat on. What now?

How are we to apply the uncleanness part of this in our daily life? Please read the article that follows on this one, [Uncleanness and separation...are these commandments still for us?](#) This may answer some questions you may have regarding uncleanness and the practical implications of it.

In short: ritual purity is in the context of the tabernacle and later the Temple. Uncleanness would defile the Tabernacle or the Temple. We do not have a Temple presently, so it is therefor not required of anybody who is unclean, for whatever reason, to be excluded or separated. For more detail please read the article linked above.

This said, this does not take away from the fact that we are to abstain from marital relations during this time. Read the instructions again carefully and you will understand.

### **Conclusion**

YHVH has given us His commandments to teach us and guide us in His ways. We are to be set apart for He is set apart. This phrase is repeated four times in Scripture, signifying the highest degree of set apartness and purity.

#### Leviticus 19:2

<sup>2</sup> “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I YHVH your Elohim am holy.

YHVH also gave His instructions in order for us to live. He said in Deuteronomy that we are to choose life. How we live is our choice, but this choice will determine our outcome. We can choose life or death, the blessing or the curse. Which one will it be for you? Will you choose today to follow YHVH's instructions and live? Even the instructions we don't understand? You know; we don't need to understand. Sometimes we get a glimpse of understanding once we start doing what He commanded, but not always.

Please prayerfully consider what is written here. Make your marriage a set apart marriage by following YHVH's instructions. There is blessing and life in it!

## References

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