HER BLOOD IS GOLD

Awakening to the Wisdom of Menstruation

by

Lara Owen

Introduction

The assumption that lies behind this book is that life is, on balance, a Good Thing, and that the processes of being female are likewise essentially a Good Thing. For the past few thousand years, certainly in Judeo-Christian culture (and in many others), being female has been seen as a Bad Thing. We have had a lineage of descent that honors the male over the female, and a preference for giving birth to sons. Consequently that which is special to the female has tended to be denigrated, whereas that which pertains to the male has been prized and respected.

Imagine how the world would be if men had periods and gave birth. The alchemy of producing blood every month would be recognized as a sign of the fertility that would be every man’s pride and joy. Instead, what we have is a world in which menstruation is commonly referred to as “the curse” and where women do everything they can to disguise the fact that they are bleeding, often to the detriment of their health and well-being.

This book is the story of my journey into the menstrual mysteries, which I undertook unconsciously in the beginning, and later, as I began to realize what was happening to me, with more intent. It also includes the stories of several other women who, like me, tumbled down the rabbit-hole into the center of the earth, and found that their blood was a key into the heart of the
Goddess.

Some years ago I began to understand the relationship between my thoughts and my physical health, and I realized that my sense of myself as a woman was warped and distressed by my thoughts, many of which were so automatic as to be unconscious. Even though I had been raised in a family that was relatively nonsexist, and had had many educational opportunities, I lived in a society that, even today, gives women the sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, message that they are inferior.

I began to have a fantasy of living at a time when there was not a thought in the collective that women were in any way lesser than men – a time when the processes of the female body were revered and respected. As I dreamed into this other reality, I realized that my whole body would be affected, and that not a cell in my being would have been formed out of ideas of female inferiority. This was a radical thought. Imagine not having a trace, a smidgen, hiding anywhere in your cells or your thoughts, that would ever imply that there was anything to be ashamed of about being female. That’s what I want, I thought. I want to live like that. I want to really honor and discover the richness of my femininity, and I want to glory in it, revel in it. I want to dance with the mystery of my wondrous alchemical womb. As a result of this journey – which I am still, of course, on – I now have a very different experience of being a woman, of menstruating, of the moon and the earth, of my body, my psyche, and my spirit. On the way I have learned how to get in touch with the wounded woman within, who bears the wounds that we all carry from growing up in a patriarchal culture. I have learned some ways to heal those wounds, and to begin to access the enormous strength that has been obscured by our ignorance of the power and beauty of the monthly cycle. I have learned that if I take time out for myself when I am bleeding I can access a centeredness and a wisdom within that feels eternal. Recognizing the value and pleasure of my periods has been a real opening for me into a deep appreciation of being a woman. The whole process has
shifted from being something that I found mildly disgusting and certainly inconvenient, to being a natural time for assessment, clearing, and preparation. It has become a time when I process the last month and prepare for the one coming. I look forward to my period as a time when I am most likely to be able to seek creative solutions to difficulties in my life – provided I make the space for it. This process has been so transformative for me that I am excited by its potential for the healing of other women.

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The book is divided into five parts – the first, Beliefs and Attitudes, begins with an exploration of our current perspective on menstruation in the Western industrialized world, seen from the personal angle of my own initiation (or rather lack of) into menstruation and fertility, and then from the collective angle of the development of patriarchal culture, the subsequent diminishment of female reality, and the role of industrialization in severing us from our cycles. Then I take a look at the eternal archetypes that underlie our conditioning, and are associated with menstruation throughout time and in cultures the world over, in particular the Moon and Blood, the Earth and Snakes. Chapter Three discusses the behavior and attitudes of societies that have a positive view of menstruation – cultures that see woman’s monthly blood as a form of gold – a source of richness with the potential to nourish both physical and spiritual life.

Part Two, Reclaiming the Cycle, is about being a woman today and how our health and well-being are damaged by our attitude towards the menstrual cycle. I discuss ways to work creatively with menstrual symptoms so that we can heal ourselves and also discover what is useful behind our premenstrual rages and our cramps and lethargy. I look at what it is about our lifestyles that so readily creates menstrual disharmony, and how by reclaiming the natural impulses of the cycle we can gain not only physical health, but also psychological
Part Three, Rituals and Recommendations, describes ways to peel away the surface layers of our conditioning and get down to our innate knowledge of the power and beauty of menstruation – knowledge that is in all of us, and which is an intrinsic part of having a positive experience of being a woman. Chapter Seven focuses on the practical steps involved in learning to menstruate with more consciousness, describing the four phases within the period itself, and dealing with issues like managing retreat time and using cloth menstrual pads. Chapter Eight goes deeper into a variety of ways to help us honor our bleeding and gain deeper awareness of our own individual experiences through keeping a journal, dreaming, rituals, meditations and working on creative projects. Chapter Nine is a concentrated compendium of natural remedies for menstrual symptoms and contains wisdom from many healing traditions.

In Part Four, Waking up to the Power, three women tell their stories of awakening to the mystery and magic and healing of menstruation. Wendy Alter was a chemical engineer with NASA who changed her lifestyle after recovering from breast cancer, and in the process discovered that her period was the strongest time for her to contact the depths of her nature – depths of feeling and insight that she had felt completely cut off from and that she recognized she had abandoned in her search for career success in a scientific world. Tamara Slayton, a pioneer in the field of menstrual education, taught women about the value of getting in touch with their cycles for many years, and was director of The Menstrual Health Foundation. Hallie Iglehart Austen, author of Womanspirit and The Heart of the Goddess, is a pioneer of women’s spirituality who works with earth-centered ritual to promote personal and planetary healing. All three women spoke with me openly about their own relationship with their bleeding, and explained how, in different ways, making a strong connection with their cycle empowered and healed them.
Part Five, Living Your Power, looks at how the conscious experience of menstruation intersects with the outer world, and discusses ways in which we can change our lifestyles to incorporate more attention to our cycles, in the context of our relationships with men, women, children, and the workplace. The book ends with a vision of a world in which women are free to menstruate in the way they want and where the wisdom of women is once again seen as a valuable social and political resource.