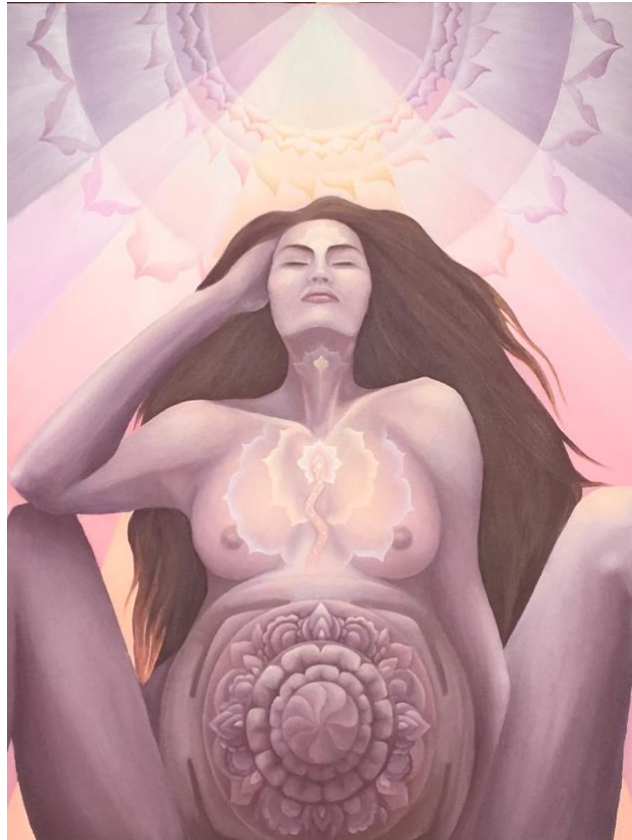


Your Menstrual Cycle under Quarantine

By Bex Tyrer



Are you wondering why your response to the current situation may dramatically change from one day to the next? Do you find yourself bathing in the bliss of solitary confinement and then feel nostalgic just watching people hug on Netflix? Or perhaps one day you are happy to wear your pyjamas and go on a rampant kitchen cleaning mission when just days before you were dressing up in your sexiest underwear and finest jewels just to potter around the garden? Well, believe it or not, awareness of the multi-dimensional ebbs and flows of your cycle can enable you to ride these inner and outer waves with a semblance of grace and understanding.

When we slow down, we have more time to pay attention and befriend our menstrual cycle in unprecedented ways. If you are currently under lockdown, then most likely the intricacies of your cycle will also be felt by those you live with. If you share your space with other menstruating women, then it may be that your cycles begin to sync up, or certain waves are amplified. Shining a light on your inner world can help to decipher if your own ups and down are independent of the external story or mirroring it! This can be a lifeline for your most immediate and intimate relationships.

Of course, for many women menstrual cycle awareness is still a distant luxury to indulge in. For example, regardless of Covid-19, there are women who have basic survival issues to tackle first and foremost. For other women, perhaps the economic fall out has put even more strain on their physical and emotional health and as a result their reproductive system is bearing the weight. So, what follows is a massive generalisation, and perhaps only relevant for the readers of this blog, who I am assuming have some spare time on their hands. It is also important to note, that women who are currently using hormonal contraceptives do not experience this natural change in hormones. Therefore, what follows would not be applicable to them, but may spark enough curiosity to ponder an alternative choice of contraceptive...Likewise, there will be women who, for various reasons are not currently experiencing a menstrual bleed, and yet may still resonate with many aspects of this article. The menstrual cycle after all, is not confined to the bleed time. It is rich and dynamic, energetic, physical and spiritual.

A Woman's inner World

The work of menstrual cycle awareness teachers, such as Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer, has been a gift to women of all ages. It is also a gift to anyone who loves a woman, or who lives with a woman, or knows a woman. Awareness of your menstrual cycle (or the cycles of those you may currently be confined with) could be the golden compass that you need to navigate these times.

Pre- Covid-19, when we needed space, most likely, we could take it. Indeed, there is a natural time in our cycle where we yearn for separation. If we fail to enact, or voice this, both the inner and outer worlds can feel overwhelming and we might inadvertently behave in a way where people simply don't want to be around us. The search for space may actually be what causes us to become grumpy, moody, or down right rude. Cultivating an awareness of this, brings a new appreciation for the yin that must support the yang. Indeed, the more we utilise the yang, the more we need the yin. For with too much fire, we will just burn ourselves out. It might feel counter-culture, yet we have just entered a global cool off, so we women might well be the ones with the most experience to know that it is necessary to shift of gear in order to travel through unpredictable terrain.

When I introduce women to this work, there is usually a sense of surprise or scepticism, which is then followed by awe or even grief. Many women spend a lifetime trying to override the natural downward current of energy – both within their monthly cycles, and also which guides them from youth to elder. Yet, once a woman is able to fully honour and receive her cycle, most likely she can embrace the whole of the experience of what it is to be fully woman.

What many of us have forgotten, or perhaps never had a chance to remember, is that we have two distinct energies within our cycle. These are like the waxing and waning of the moon. During the first half of our cycle we have an upward current of rising energy which drops downwards after ovulation to our bleed time. The effects of these waves are beautifully unique for every woman. It is her personal feedback loop and it tells her

what she could fine tune or pay attention to in her life. By doing so, she is no longer outsourcing her power. Instead she can make choices that support her inner balance according to what information her monthly cycle is offering her. This inner balance is multi-dimensional. It affects ones emotional, physical and psychological bodies.

Within these two complementary currents is a further narrative, which mirrors the character of the four seasons, or times of day. Tracking your cycle and correlating this info over time, can help to identify internal patterns which are independent of the external chaos. This can be an important reminder that some of our peaks and troughs are physiological as opposed to societal!

A brief intro into your inner seasons

Inner spring: This is the time when you come out of your bleed and your energy begins to rise in preparation for ovulation. It tends to be the time for new ideas, yet it is still the time to take it easy and to hold back just like a tender new sapling which slowly breaks through the surface of the earth to make its way upwards towards the sun. Spring awakens new possibilities and perspectives.

In regards to the current situation, it may be that you now have some new insights, new thoughts, or have made peace with what just two weeks ago felt like an impossible situation.

Inner Summer: This rise in energy reaches its summit at ovulation. If you have honoured your cycle and your tank is full, then this tends to be the more social or busier aspect of your cycle. It can feel like a magnet is pulling you out of your shell, and is encouraging you to dance in the sun. However, if you have been running on empty month after month, year after year, this peak may be hard to identify, or conversely, you may feel a deep exhaustion. The reserves are empty. Your adrenals are steering the ship, yet what is needed is a long retreat back into your shell.

In regards to the current situation, it may be that you are clawing at the door trying to retrieve your social life. If your single, perhaps your reaching for the dating app, if you're in a long-distance relationship perhaps your finding creative ways to stay connected! Most likely, you are feeling more compassionate to those running amuck on social media, or are able to lift up another spirits fairly easily.

Inner Autumn: The return home. The inner and outer judges come out and have their say. This could be the time of the truth speaker as well as the inner critic. The time of holding the tension between inner sentiments and the outer reality. Yet it can also be the time of clearing out that which no longer serves; such as taking some important decisions related to relationships, work or simply what is really valuable to you. It can feel like a storm is brewing, or the metaphoric volcano is just about to erupt.

In regards to the current situation, this can often be the time that old trauma's resurface and are even triggered by the present situation. Pre-menstruum is the cleaning out of whats on the inside and can often be accompanied by a yearning to literally clean your space around you! So if panic and anxiety are familiar ghosts in your closet be gentle with yourself if they want to make a reappearance around now. For many women, the immune system can take a temporary dip here, so it is especially important to slow right down and nourish yourself to the best of your ability. Often times we reach for old coping mechanisms which may simultaneously equate to self-sabotage. Therefore, now is the time to really prioritise your self-care and find gentler ways to take the pressure off. If you are in a long-distance relationship, make sure you remind your partner that this is your time of separation, and thank them for understanding and holding the space for you to journey further inwards. The contraction is necessary in order to be able to come out of the other side more present and available.

Inner Winter: The relief. Just letting go. There is no need to fix or control but simply the beauty of leaning into surrender. Your inner winter carries you into your bleed time where the retreat into the womb space can open up an awareness to a deeper knowing. For many it might feel natural to retreat into the shelter of solitude. Ideally, it is your time to do nothing. It is time to *just be* and to receive these new visions or insights. It can be the time of potent dreams and new beginnings.

In regards to the current situation, perhaps this is the first time that you have been able to fully surrender to your bleed and really rest — and by that, I mean — to not do a thing! To take deep rest during your period can allow your system to reset and with it bring insights for how to move forwards. On one hand, this is also mirroring the rest and retreat which we are finally allowing mother earth to sink into.

Integrating your inner cycle with your outer world

Many women view their cycle as an inconvenient bleed or as an ovulatory burst to be capitalised on. However, in reality, menstrual cycle awareness offers a way for women to navigate their relationship to this global time of uncertainty and change. It is also a wonderful opportunity to question the validity of any sense of overwhelm or inability to cope. For if we think that a feeling, or indeed a situation, will last forever, it can be unbearable. Yet if we can just let it be and welcome a sense of curiosity and presence, it will fade in its natural time. These moments of intensity are often portals for deeper insight. Especially if such feelings have a patten and tend to rise up during your pre-menstruum/ inner autumn. They often point to aspects of your life which are demanding a change. If we continue to override these niggles or nudges then most likely they will continue to arise month after month. It is so powerful to tune into this feedback loop and respond accordingly. Doing so can feel deeply empowering, especially when it might feel that the rest of our life is spinning out of control. I also feel a tremendous amount of wonder in knowing that, if nothing else, there are literally millions of women around the world who might be taking a proper menstrual holiday for the first time in their lives. The health benefits, just like the wonders that the natural world is experiencing from our respite, may be astounding.

The gift of lockdown

During this enforced lockdown/slow down, you may be offering your system an opportunity to really reset. I have received several messages from past students who write, with amazement, that their menstruation has returned after months or years of it being AWOL. I do believe, this is because they have had to anchor in, quieten down, and stopped moving around so much.

At the other end of the spectrum, women can usually set their alarm by predictability of their bleed, may now be experiencing menstrual irregularity. Stress and anxiety can be a huge disturbance to our reproductive system. Over the last few weeks there has been ample fodder for both. For example, going into indefinite lock-down, self-isolation, loss of revenue or conversely an increase in work hours (especially as a care giver or medical worker) may interrupt this delicate inner flow. There are also many women who are incredibly receptive to a deeper level of feeling. So even if their personal lives haven't been directly affected, it may be that their cycle has been disrupted by a more illusive, yet still tangible, deeper layer of empathy.

We are experiencing a rather unique time. A time where many women who have been searching outside of themselves for solutions for far too long, may now be forced to slow down. This is a precious time to hone in on the wisdom of their cycle and really receive the two energies of their cycle. There is great value in honouring the larger downward current, the waning of the moon and the current unprecedented slowing down of society. Perhaps this ability to be still and hold the tension of the contraction and expansion of our inner world may help us to trust that the same contraction of the outer world, is on a far greater level, necessary for our collective health and well-being.

Art: 'Birthing' by Haylee Clare