

ALEXANDRA POPE and
SJANIE HUGO WURLITZER
FOUNDERS OF RED SCHOOL

The background of the cover features abstract, flowing red ink splashes and swirls against a white background, creating a sense of movement and organic form. The ink is a vibrant red color, and its patterns are reminiscent of smoke or liquid in motion.

wild power

Discover the Magic of
Your Menstrual Cycle
and Awaken the
Feminine Path to Power

Praise for *Wild Power*

‘Finally. It’s happening. Women are waking up to our real power – the power that comes through our physical bodies – our menstrual cycles and lunar wisdom. Power that has been shamed and vilified for centuries, but which can no longer be kept silent or kept down. Let Wild Power lead you to its very source.’

DR CHRISTIANE NORTHRUP, AUTHOR OF *GODDESSES NEVER AGE* AND *WOMEN’S BODIES, WOMEN’S WISDOM*

‘The female body reconstitutes the world. And yet the very blood that makes that possible became the reason that we are less holy, less capable of holding positions of authority or speaking on behalf of the divine. It’s time we remember that there’s no scripture more sacred than being in our own skin. Embodiment is our holiest spiritual path. And Wild Power paves the way.’

MEGGAN WATTERSON, AUTHOR OF *REVEAL: A SACRED MANUAL FOR GETTING SPIRITUALLY NAKED*

‘Wild Power is a beautifully conceived and articulated work on a subject long neglected yet central to women and society: the conscious and integrated experience of the menstrual cycle. This book charts a wise, healing and holistic process of self-knowing and empowerment through developing menstrual cycle awareness, guiding the reader towards sustainable wellbeing grounded in the natural rhythms of the body and the seasons. If you follow the pathway described in this book, your whole life will be radically enhanced as a result. Welcome to the full spectrum version of being a woman.’

LARA OWEN, TEACHER AND CONSULTANT ON MENSTRUAL WELLBEING, AND AUTHOR OF *HER BLOOD IS GOLD*

‘Reading Wild Power is to be initiated into a source of a profound power and

wisdom, which for many of us perhaps was forgotten, but as we learn through this gem of a book, was never lost. From their decades of practice and studies in the realms of women's cycles, with breathtaking generosity and luminosity, the authors guide us back to the humble authority of true embodiment. I believe this is the guidebook needed for these times, when millions of women are hearing the call to lead the way for humans to live in alignment, in collaboration and honouring of body and earth. I am profoundly grateful that this book is finally here. For the benefit of us all.'

CHAMELI ARDAGH, FOUNDER, WWW.AWAKENINGWOMEN.COM

'Alexandra and Sjanie are wonderful guides to discovering the Wild Power that lies within your femininity and your cycle. They walk with you as you discover the beautiful complexity of your cycle, show you how to awaken and live your Wild Power, and lead you deeper into the joy, the sweet tenderness and the love and vision that it offers you. This book is a powerful addition to the current evolution of the story of the menstrual cycle and the awakening of women.'

MIRANDA GRAY, AUTHOR OF RED MOON AND THE OPTIMIZED WOMAN, AND ORIGINATOR OF THE WORLDWIDE WOMB BLESSING

'If you can't imagine anything less interesting or less appealing than menstrual cycle awareness, but wouldn't mind a dose of Wild Power, take a leap of faith and venture into Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer's new book of that name. With mastery born of deep personal contemplation and paradigm-changing commitment, be intrigued, be amused, be moved, be surprised, and perhaps be angry too that no one enlightened you to the extraordinary potential hidden within your menstrual experience. Until now. Let Alexandra and Sjanie guide you, step by step, and discover your very own Wild Power.'

JANE BENNETT, AUTHOR OF A BLESSING NOT A CURSE AND GIRLTOPIA

'Alexandra and Sjanie are true gurus of menstruality consciousness. Their work is vital, timely and empowering for everyone. Wild Power is the new bible for every woman, and every man who lives and works with women. Read this book, follow its guidance and give to everyone you love.'

UMA DINSMORE TULI PhD, AUTHOR OF YONI SHAKTI: A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO POWER AND FREEDOM THROUGH YOGA AND TANTRA

‘Western women long for a modern cosmology that inspires us to be our whole selves: passionate, powerful and instinctual. Wild Power is the golden thread in a living tapestry that is being woven by women around the world. It helps make sense of not just our cycles, but our souls and our deeper calling to create a new story for womankind, the womb of the world. Profoundly practical and intensely spiritual, may Wild Power one day be a required text – for both genders – in all high schools and colleges.’

CLARE DUBOIS AND EDVEEJE FAIRCHILD, DIRECTORS OF TREESISTERS – THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND FEMININE LEADERSHIP CHARITY

‘Alexandra, Sjanie and I share the view that if women reclaim the power inherent in our menstrual cycle, then the world will be a different place. In fact the energy from the women already on this path has already started a revolution! This excellent book describes the necessary process of Menstrual Cycle Awareness from its mythic and epic perspective, leading the reader into her own journey of discovering and reconnecting with her innate Wild Power.’

JANE HARDWICKE COLLINGS, FOUNDER OF THE SCHOOL OF SHAMANIC WOMANCRAFT

‘Get wild. Get Wild Power. This unique book will rock you right down to your belly button, right down to your womb space. It occupies a prominent place on my short shelf of important books about women’s cycles. Far more than a book about menstruation or menopause – though it covers both – Wild Power is a testament and a guide book to being the woman you always knew you were: juicy, succulent, empowered and wild.’

SUSUN WEED, AUTHOR OF NEW MENOPAUSAL YEARS THE WISE WOMAN WAY

‘Yet again Alexandra, with her new co-author Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer, has pulled the genie out of the bottle! Or should I say out of the menstrual cup? Drawing on her deep experience in psychotherapy, and her many years of educating women in menstrual awareness, she and Sjanie have written a book that demystifies, but adds to the mystery and mastery of, the menstrual cycle. Many women will find this book helps them to live a richer, fuller life.’

FRANCESCA NAISH, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE JOCELYN CENTRE, AND

AUTHOR OF *NATURAL FERTILITY*

‘Wild Power packs a punch. Whether you want to resource yourself as a “cycle-smart” woman, explore the glory of the deep feminine or repattern the rhythms of your life, Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer have the inside story on how to step into your power. A must-read for anyone who is curious about how we can strengthen ourselves to live into the challenges of the 21st century with all our intelligence and instincts intact.’

**SARAH ROZENTHULER, CHARTERED PSYCHOLOGIST, LEADERSHIP CONSULTANT
AND AUTHOR OF *LIFE-CHANGING CONVERSATIONS***

‘Humanity would not exist were it not for the menstrual cycle. Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer offer innovative psychological and spiritual perspectives, and practical ways to cultivate a joyful, healthy, nourishing relationship with this powerful mechanism of life.’

DR CLAUDIA WELCH DOM, AUTHOR OF *BALANCE YOUR HORMONES, BALANCE YOUR LIFE*

‘Sjanie and Alexandra have written an important book to support women everywhere to recognize the power inherent in who they are. In these times of great opportunity and challenge, it feels to us to be vital that women and men everywhere remember the natural cycles in life, and this book is a wonderful contribution to that remembering. We heartily recommend you read it and share it widely.’

**SUSANNAH AND YA’ACOV DARLING KHAN, FOUNDERS OF THE SCHOOL OF
MOVEMENT MEDICINE**

‘I read this book with a mixture of awe, excitement, joy and sorrow. Awe, excitement and joy at the elegant, eloquent, articulate rendering of the reverence for life unleashed from cyclical awareness. Excitement at the clarity of the authors’ vision, the sure-footedness of their experienced and practical steps to take towards that daily reverence. Sorrow for the women, men and children whose lives have not yet been touched by this emerging field of conscious menstruation. This is a transformative read that will touch the lives of many and

light the world forever with its wisdom.'

DR ANNA COLE, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, KINGS COLLEGE, LONDON

'Wild Power is an important read for those who are newly engaged on their journey of Menstrual Cycle Awareness (MCA), or who wish to start the journey. It is a helpful read for those who teach MCA or fertility awareness as it is filled with practical tools for addressing each woman's individual nature. It is an important read for those who are in the helping profession and serving women's physiological and psychological concerns.'

**GERALDINE MATUS PhD, JUSTISSE METHOD FOUNDER, JUSTISSE COLLEGE
ACADEMIC DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR OF WORLD'S GEOGRAPHY OF LOVE**

'When you read these pages, you will feel a memory in your body that has been buried for ages. Wild Power is a light in the dark to help each woman truly reclaim her whole body as her first home, and her cycle as her biological powerhouse.'

THERESE JORNLIN, DESIGNER OF WOMEN AWAKE CURRICULUM, USA

'Buried beneath her stress and confusion, every woman has a wellspring of feminine power and radiant confidence. Wild Power is the long overdue treasure map to find it.'

**TERA WARNER, COMMUNICATION NINJA AND FOUNDER OF
WWW.WISHRADIO.COM**

Also by Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer

The Pill: Are You Sure It's For You? A. Pope and J. Bennett
(Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2008)

The Fertile Body Method: A Practitioner's Manual, S. Hugo Wurlitzer
(Crown House Publishing, Wales, 2009)

The Fertile Body Method: Practitioner's Training DVD, S. Hugo Wurlitzer
(Mighty Productions, London, 2011)

The Wild Genie: The Healing Power of Menstruation, A. Pope
(Sally Milner Publishing, Australia, 2003; Re-published 2014, New Generation Publishing)

The Woman's Quest: Unfolding Women's Path of Power and Wisdom, A. Pope
A 13-session course, self-published, 2006

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Welcome

Let's start with a wild idea: as a woman you are coded for power, and the journey to realizing the fullness and beauty of that power lies in the rhythm and change of your menstrual cycle.

The energy within your menstrual cycle is a force we call your Wild Power. It's an animating presence – a holy intelligence that holds the blueprint of who you are and your highest potential.

We have an important story to share with you about this power within the female body. It's a story that evolves every day as women consciously experience their menstrual cycle. As they step up to claim the cycle, they unleash a consciousness that dignifies women and holds all life sacred. This living body of knowledge is vital for us, and essential for our times.

For centuries within our culture, this Feminine Way of the menstrual cycle has been denied, demonized and rejected. We've been led to believe it's a limitation or a weakness we must overcome in order to succeed. We challenge all that, and unveil the extraordinary truth that your menstrual cycle is in fact a highly potent, potentially liberating process. It's your custom-made initiatory path to power.

In this book you'll discover that the menstrual cycle is a woman's spiritual practice. It's both immensely pragmatic and gloriously ecstatic-making, opening you to the most blissful, visionary and holy places without effort. As you learn to work with your cycle you'll awaken new forms of intelligence and knowing; you'll clear the channel to your inner oracle, and activate the DNA of your soul – your Wild Power.

The menstrual cycle is your ultimate guide to befriending yourself, and utterly

relishing the full pleasure and authority of being a woman.

So significant is this menstrual knowledge, it'll rewire the way you view your life, how you choose to live, and how you do business. It'll open new levels of understanding and appreciation between women and men – especially in relationships. It'll alter how you approach the journey of conception, pregnancy, birth and motherhood (should you take that route), and transform how you understand and greet menopause and your postmenopause life.

This new story about the menstrual cycle has been pieced together through our own menstrual experiences, and those of the countless women we've worked with during the past 30 years. The story wouldn't let us go. It was insistent – snapping at our heels all our menstruating lives, demanding to be known and told.

Wild Power has called us both to speak up about this awesome potential within the female body, and we strongly believe that as long as this knowledge remains unnamed and unrecognized, it's both traumatizing women and a real loss for society as a whole.

WE DISCOVER OUR CALLING

No woman in her right mind wakes one morning and decides that menstruation is a good career path, especially in this day and age, when menstruation is one of the most loathed or difficult topics on the planet. So, how did we land up as the directors of the UK's Red School, teaching on the power of the menstrual cycle and making our squillions from a career in menstruation?

Alexandra's story

For Alexandra, perhaps it started a few months before her first bleed, on the cusp of turning 14. She was at a British boarding school and had a beautiful experience of awakening. We know now that this phenomenon can occur for young girls around the time of menarche (the first bleed) because there's a natural psychic opening. Alexandra remembers it vividly:

‘It occurred as I came out of the Sunday evening church service – perhaps the religious atmosphere stirred something. Suddenly, everything felt alive and full of love. I was ecstatic as I walked to the dining hall for supper. School food was bad at the best of times, and Sunday supper could plumb new depths of bad, yet that evening, I felt I was eating the food of the gods. It tasted so divine.’

Alexandra's awakening experience lasted about 36 hours. She told no one about it at the time but has never forgotten it. About three months later, her period arrived. ‘I distinctly remember experiencing the light and a huge feeling of pride,’ she says. ‘No one had given me reason to feel pride; in fact, my teachings about puberty had been really perfunctory.’

Nonetheless, the stage was set for Alexandra to discover the power of the menstrual cycle. A connection had been established and it would grow. We would say that in this moment, her Wild Power woke up and began to organize her life.

Throughout her 20s Alexandra was a passionate advocate of women taking charge of their bodies through fertility awareness. An avid journal keeper, on one occasion she wrote the following entry: ‘The world is singing today. Last night I got my period.’ Unwittingly, she'd tapped into the spiritual forces of menstruation. But a few more years would pass before this became fully conscious.

The menstrual work formally announced itself to Alexandra when she was 31 years old. 'I was seized by the most outrageous pain that returned for three or four days each menstrual month,' she recalls.

'In an attempt to heal my body, I made the radical decision to give space to menstruation whenever I could – to be utterly present to myself and the pain, rather than taking drugs. I truly felt my body was talking to me and I chose to listen. It was profoundly challenging but, in the wake of that pain, came revelation and, most importantly, healing.'

Alexandra's perception of menstruation altered radically. In workshops and in her psychotherapy practice, she began to share with other women what she'd discovered about the psychological and spiritual forces of the female body.

The more she taught, the more she discovered that women's stories held the gold. When she stopped to listen, and followed the natural impulse of the cycle, it was as though a whole new world, a new cosmology, revealed itself: the feminine cosmology. Alexandra was charged by this knowledge, and couldn't help but be true to her Calling.

This was back in the 1980s and 90s, an era when attitudes towards menstruation were still in the dark ages. But thanks to sheer perseverance, synchronicities, allies, and support from unexpected sources in Australia, where she was living at that time – among them the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ABC Radio National, and other respected institutions such as Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women – Alexandra was provided with public opportunities to speak about what she was discovering. Word began to spread.

By the time Alexandra reached menopause, she had three books under her belt, including *The Wild Genie: the healing power of menstruation* and the co-authored *The Pill: are you sure it's for you?* She was ready to give up the day job – her successful psychotherapy practice – and leap fully into her Calling of teaching the menstrual work.

‘I felt a deep compulsion to close my practice and move back to the UK,’ she says. ‘I had such a strong, clear mission to articulate a fresh understanding of the nature and power of the Feminine, and to fully restore the role of the menstrual cycle in the world.’ Today, nine years later, she’s fulfilling this mission and loving the liberation, authority and deep sense of belonging in the world that the postmenopause life can bestow.

Sjanie's story

Meanwhile, Sjanie (pronounced sharnee /'ʃɑːniː/), having left her homeland of South Africa to move to London, had her own epiphanies about the cycle and being a woman. After seven years on hormonal contraception in her 20s, she began to experience crippling pain after orgasm: 'I had an intuition that the solution was to come off hormonal contraception, and when I did, my Calling exploded open.

'So powerful were the energies when my menstrual cycle returned, that I sometimes feared for my sanity. In retrospect it was like releasing a wild animal from its cage. My inner life went from black and white to glorious technicolour.'

With time, Sjanie learnt to stabilize within the rhythm of the cycle, and realized she was discovering herself, as if for the first time. Her life began to flow in exciting and meaningful ways. She changed relationship and career, and stumbled upon Movement Medicine: a strong source of support and healing that has become a lifelong practice and passion.

From then on, Sjanie's fascination with the menstrual cycle grew, and through her profession as a hypnotherapist and psychotherapist she developed an expertise in fertility, working in private practice and as part of an integrated medical team in London. She developed the Fertile Body Method, which was born out of her success with hundreds of women, and wrote a book, *The Fertile Body Method – A practitioner's manual*.

During this time, with the support of the menstrual cycle, Sjanie began the slow process of piecing together the deeper story of why she'd so ruthlessly shut her cycle out. 'It began with my menarche at 15, which I hid for three or four months from almost everyone,' she recalls. 'I only told my best friend.'

It was as though, in that moment, Sjanie didn't want to know her destiny as a woman who would come to speak loudly and passionately for this work. This is a classic occurrence when one's Calling comes calling. On reflection, Sjanie now realizes that her young self who, on some level, understood the enormity of what was happening, didn't trust that she'd be held and supported in the depth and charge of this awakening process.

Today, Sjanie is the mother of two young girls, and has experienced firsthand the gift that intimate cycle awareness brings to pregnancy and the birthing process. She continues to be tutored by the cycle, and has reaped enormous insight and support in how to mother her girls with connection, intimacy and love at the helm.

'My understanding of this work is being continuously challenged and shaped by the often messy and hard realities of having children, being in a relationship *and* running a business,' she says.

Founding the Red School

In 2004, when Alexandra ran her second workshop in London with the wonderful mind body spirit events organization Alternatives, Sjanie was one of the first participants to sign up: ‘I was so relieved to find someone talking soulfully about the cycle,’ she recalls.

A few years later, Sjanie and Alexandra met up for lunch, and they haven’t stopped talking about menstruation since. Together, they hatched grand plans to reinstate the full majesty and wise intelligence of the menstrual cycle throughout the world.

Eventually, they went on to co-found Red School. Red School offers online and in-person professional training and public workshops that teach about the power of the menstrual cycle for self-care and inner work, as a guide to the creative process and a woman’s spiritual practice.

A WILD IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Today, to our wonderment, we see evidence of our vision coming to pass: both in terms of how this work evolves and impacts the lives of the women we work with, and in changes in mainstream conversation. Finally, a new field is emerging, as huge numbers of women around the world step forward to share and teach on the power of the female body.

The media is a good litmus test for this changing conversation. In the USA, *Cosmopolitan* named 2015 as ‘the year the period went public’, while *Newsweek* declared 2016 as ‘the year of menstrual change’, devoting the whole of its front cover to the topic of menstruation. While these magazines weren’t talking about the cycle’s psychological and spiritual powers, they *were* naming the taboo, and explaining how it harms women. It’s clear that things are changing.

Introducing menstruality

This emerging field of consciousness is a fresh iteration of an ancient imperative that's existed since the first woman menstruated. Until fairly recently, though, we didn't have a term to describe what it was we were teaching about, in other words the full path of intelligence, healing and power of the menstrual cycle process, from menarche to menopause and beyond. In 2005, Jane Catherine Severn, a psychotherapist and educator from New Zealand, wrote an article in which she recognized that as long as we didn't name this vital field of feminine empowerment it would continue to be ignored and dismissed. She wrote, 'Nowhere in the vast lexicon of English is there to be found a word for this phenomenon which, far beyond the biological and functional purposes of reproduction commonly ascribed to it, also provides the loom upon which the full potentials of feminine consciousness can be woven in a very thorough and purposeful way throughout a woman's life.'¹ So she coined the word 'menstruality' to bring this field into the public conversation, and we are deeply grateful for this.²

Menstruality is the female life process from menarche to menopause, through the menstruating years and into our mature years. We describe it as our 'initiatory journey to power': a psychological death and rebirth process that leads to ever more expanded levels of consciousness.

It's the actual lived experience of this repeated initiation, which occurs month after month; the deep knowing that a woman accumulates in herself and simultaneously generates in her community. Menstruality is the naming and exploring of the subtle, mysterious forces within women – the hidden powers that are released when consciousness is brought to bear on our biological life changes.

In this book, when we use the word 'menstruality' we're essentially referring to the consciousness that's generated when women love, live and engage with their menstrual cycle process, including menarche and menopause. You can find a

fuller description of what we mean by menstruality at
redschool.net/menstruality.



A Vision to Hold

We'd like to share a vision with you that we hope will open possibilities for your own personal journey as a woman, and where that might lead us as a society. We've no intention of going back to some remembered past, or trying to recapture an ancient idyll. Our feet are firmly planted in the 21st century, and we believe our vision speaks to the needs and dreams of our time.

Imagine a society in which the cycles of life are revered and respected as quiet orchestrators of our lives – instilling a deep reverence for the planet and everything on it. Imagine that the menstrual cycle is understood as the heartbeat of that Great Orchestration, and most crucially, honoured as the sacred source of life for us humans.

Imagine that knowledge of the full spectrum and power of the menstrual cycle is commonplace, and all women feel the utter rightness of having this experience within them. Imagine a world in which the menstrual cycle is respected as a woman's spiritual practice. Imagine girls growing up in this menstrual-affirming world.

When a girl arrives at menarche (the first bleed) she feels a real dignity and a strong 'yes' to her being. Once her cycle has established itself, she learns how to chart it (record the physical, mental and emotional pattern), so she can literally *read* her own body. Awareness of the menstrual cycle becomes second nature to her – as natural as eating and sleeping.

When the issue of contraception arises for a woman, she's already grounded in cycle awareness, including her fertility signs. Instead of hormonal contraception dominating the conversation, she now has choices. As she matures she receives teachings on the inner powers of the menstrual cycle, and how to work with it as an inner guide and a tool for creating wellbeing. Over time, these teachings and

inner discoveries expand into a deeper creative and spiritual journey.

Imagine that throughout our communities and institutions there are respected women who are professional holders and teachers of this menstruality knowledge. They support girls and women from menarche to menopause and beyond. Through the passage of a girl's emerging sexuality and, if she so chooses, in preparation for conception, pregnancy, birth and motherhood.

Imagine that as a woman grows into the powers of the cycle, she befriends her sexuality and is gradually initiated into the full ecstatic, sexual power of the female body. She's empowered to experience enormous pleasure and sexual freedom, and is perfectly set up for the journey to motherhood.

All women who choose to become mothers are prepared for conception, pregnancy, birth and motherhood through the practice of cycle awareness, and the body knowledge and self-understanding that creates.

Imagine that women are so grounded in their menstrual cycle that they naturally develop trust in their body and their inner life-giving processes. So when they arrive at the threshold of giving birth they have the necessary faith in their body, and months of experience in the art of surrender.

Imagine that throughout a woman's menstruating years she grows a fierce inner dignity about the uniqueness of who she is – a deep affirmation that comes through her mindful engagement with the menstrual cycle. Through years of cycle awareness she's supported to grow into her full capacity to take responsibility for who she is, and the world that she lives in.

Imagine a world in which menopause is recognized as a healthy, organic step in a woman's evolutionary journey. In her deep self a woman knows she's been prepared for this moment, even as she might feel trepidation. Because she's developed impeccable self-care from years of living and loving her cycle, she knows her physical and emotional vulnerabilities and how to care for them.

She willingly accepts the necessary challenge of menopause, knowing that postmenopause, she'll step into the vital and powerful role of serving her community and the world. She knows she'll be profoundly met and respected as a smart, wise, authoritative and beautiful older woman.



Invitation to the Journey

As you read this book we'd like you to imagine you're on a journey with us, moving ever deeper into the inner temple of wholeness as a woman – and into the vision we've just described. As you read our words we hope you'll begin to piece together the unique female 'alphabet' to describe and understand your experience. And to see how the menstrual cycle process awakens you to your Wild Power.

Together, we're going to explore the female journey to power – from menarche to menopause through the process of the menstruating years – and understand how this dynamic awakens your Wild Power. We describe the necessary skills and knowledge to consciously negotiate this path, and offer practical guidance for living it in today's world.

We want you to discover your own unique version of the archetypal story we're sharing. This knowledge doesn't require validation from external sources – only your own sweet recognition, and validation of what you experience.

We'd like to officially welcome you to join us. We hope our words will bring deep relief and recognition, filled with a reassurance that everything about you is right.

ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is about your Calling or ‘purpose’, which we call your Wild Power. For women, the Calling is orchestrated and supported by the menstrual cycle and the pivotal moments of menarche, menstruation, pregnancy and birth (should you choose to become a mother) and menopause.

The journey to realizing your Calling is made possible by the process of initiation, which is encoded in your menstrual cycle. Essentially, initiation is something that happens to you: you can’t control it and by its nature it forces you to change. Initiatory change happens through the archetypal pattern of death and rebirth – which is exactly what we experience each month at menstruation.

Here’s an overview of the book’s contents:

In [*Chapter 1*](#) we talk about the exciting Wild Power revolution that’s already begun, and explain how you can fuel it by coming to know your menstrual cycle more deeply. We also debunk an outdated myth, bring the menstrual cycle out of the shadows, and explain why menstrual cycle awareness and charting is a crucial practice that no woman should be without. We want you to be well prepared for the journey ahead.

With this information under your belt you’re ready to dive into [*Chapter 2*](#), a conversation about power – what we mean by it, and the nature of the female path to realizing it.

It’s down to business in [*Part II*](#), where we reveal the three ‘inner maps’ that describe the psychological and spiritual architecture of women, and guide you on your female path to power. [*Chapter 3*](#) introduces the first of these maps, The Two Vias, which are the basic energy pattern of the cycle that underpins that

path.

In [Chapter 4](#) we explore the second map, The Inner Seasons of the menstrual cycle. We explain the ‘powers’ and ‘sacred tasks’ of each ‘season’ of the cycle, and the crucial role these play in helping you get to know yourself and mature into the fullness of your Wild Power.

Then we arrive at the heart of the book – menstruation, the inner temple of women. [Chapter 5](#) unfolds the third map, The Five Chambers of Menstruation, and reveals the exquisite and subtle detail of how you’re led into an encounter with Love, awoken to your Calling – your Wild Power – and gifted with the possibility of experiencing profound wholeness and belonging each and every month.

In [Part III](#), we get real about what it takes to embody your Wild Power in the world. [Chapter 6](#), one of our favourites, gives you a new take on an old foe: your inner critic. It turns out that the critic has a natural home in the menstrual cycle, and when it’s restored to that place, it can play its sacred role of initiating you into the inner sanctum of your being. In [Chapter 7](#), we describe how your partner can join you in this sacred experience.

In [Chapter 8](#) we share the full practice of menstrual cycle awareness, and teach you the skill of charting your cycle to awaken its power and realize optimum wellness, creative fulfilment, and a rich spiritual life.

If at this point you’re wondering how on earth you’re ever going to live all this amazing menstruality power in your daily life, we’ve got some answers for you in [Chapter 9](#).

In the [Epilogue](#), we conclude our journey by celebrating the importance of cycle awareness for the sanity of the world. We believe the work of recovering the collective power of our menstrual cycles can reinstate the Feminine in a very real, organic way, and help to restore ‘an environmentally sustainable, deeply fulfilling and socially just human presence on this earth’.³

First-hand experiences and practices

This book is filled with our own experiences and those of some of the women we've worked with over the years. Throughout, we've scattered quotes and first-hand stories, many of which are drawn from the menstrual cycle awareness experiences that women have shared in our Facebook community.

We also offer a number of menstruality practices. Feel free to cherry-pick your way through these. They take time; they *need* time. Choose the ones that best support you right now, and then come back later and select others to focus on. In this way, over time, you'll work your way through them all. This is a book that can accompany you over the years; it's a book to read and reread as your cycle experience evolves.

Let what you read illuminate your current experience of the menstrual cycle: notice how you feel as you read the words, and have a journal to hand to record what comes up for you. You can also take the process deeper and get personal support on our courses – in workshops and online.

In the private Facebook group that accompanies our courses, you can obtain guidance from the Red School community and our Red School mentors. You can also find yourself a 'listening partner' – this is one of our most highly prized practices for releasing the inner gold of your cycle. (You'll learn all about it in [Chapter 9](#).)



Who Is This Book for?

Wild Power is a book for women, and men, who are interested in personal and spiritual development and world change. It's intended for those who recognize the imperative of restoring the power of the Feminine, and enabling women to claim their full authority and leadership in the world.

While we mostly address women, we want *everyone* to have this knowledge, whether they have a menstrual cycle or not. After all, it's basic cyclical wisdom and we're all cyclical beings. It's just that for menstruating women, the experience is intensified manifold over.

As a woman, you're likely to approach the book from a number of different positions. You may:

- Be in your menstruating years, deep in the heart of this initiatory journey.
- Have a regular cycle.
- Have an irregular cycle.
- Have no cycle at all and not be pregnant.
- Be on hormonal contraception.

- Be perimenopausal, menopausal or postmenopausal.
- Suffer from menstrual problems such as pain, PMS, fibroids, polycystic ovarian syndrome, fertility issues or heavy bleeding.

ENGAGING WITH THE BOOK

Wherever you are on this spectrum of experience, with *Wild Power* you're getting the woman's handbook to sanity and love – and medicine itself for those who suffer. Understanding your menstrual cycle, whatever life stage you're at, is the doorway to taking this knowledge into your daily life.

If you have an irregular cycle

We'd strongly recommend that, as you begin this book, you make a clear intention for how you'd like to experience your cycle and then dive in and see what unfolds. You can still work with the cycle you have, however strange and erratic it might be.

Follow the full instructions for menstrual cycle awareness in [Chapter 8](#). You might have to be a little patient if your cycle is especially long. Hold to the idea that paying attention to the cycle can, in itself, help regulate it. Or, at the very least, help you to see the pattern in the cycle you *do* have.

If your cycle has gone AWOL

If you have no cycle at all, and are not pregnant, breastfeeding, or postmenopausal, you can follow the instructions for menstrual cycle awareness in [Chapter 8](#), where we describe how to use the moon cycle as your orientation. Combined with other natural remedies – many of which we share in our online course Hormone Harmony (see [Resources](#) section) – you may just entice your cycle back.

This book will also help you to look at your attitudes towards menstruation and encourage more rhythm in your life in general, which is always a good thing.

If you're pregnant or breastfeeding

If you're not menstruating for these reasons, you're in a very different and wonderful cycle right now and learning about your menstrual cycle may not feel right or appropriate. One day it will return and then the book can really speak to you. In the meantime, may your pregnancy and the birth of your baby be a blessed experience.

If you're on hormonal contraception

While on the pill, or using implants, injections or the patch, you're *not* having a normal menstrual cycle. The 'bleed' you experience when on the pill is not a normal menstrual bleed but rather a result of withdrawal from the drug.

You may use the pill for contraception or to manage menstrual problems. While it's vital you have reliable contraception and a means to manage your suffering, we believe that to shut down this important natural cycle with highly potent synthetic hormones potentially damages your body and soul. And you'll be unable to access the wonderful powers we speak of in this book.

So, what to do? We want you to be well resourced to make the best decision for you. To learn more about the dangers of hormonal contraception, and viable alternatives, check out Alexandra's co-authored book *The Pill: are you sure it's for you?* (Allen & Unwin, 2008). To start down the path of menstrual healing, read *Wild Power*, and check out our online course Hormone Harmony (see [Resources](#) section) for other self-care guidance and resources.

Above all, take time to 'feel' into what's right for you. While you think through your options we strongly recommend you chart your pill-induced cycle (see [Chapter 1](#) for how to do this), or the moon cycle (see [Chapter 8](#)) if you're using other hormonal contraception.

This won't be the same as a real menstrual cycle, but becoming aware of your pill-induced cycle, and experiencing the reflective processes we recommend in the book, will be useful and potentially healing. They may help you to get clear about your next step.

If you're perimenopausal

At this stage in your life, you may be wondering if anything in this book is relevant to you. Well, we want to proclaim loudly: 'Yes, it is.' In fact, it's crucial. Menopause sits on a continuum – part of a larger story initiated at your very first bleed. We believe it's vital for you to recover the story – the one contained in this book – to prepare yourself for menopause.

If your cycle is already a little erratic, chart it anyway (see [Chapter 1](#)), and draw on your memory of your past years of cycling. If you haven't had a bleed for a while, keep note of the number of days since the last bleed and simply chart following the phases of the moon, if you feel the need for some sort of anchor (see [Chapter 8](#)).

The initial stages of menopause are a bit more complex because you truly step into an unknown place; you're off all normal maps for a while. Nonetheless, even as you navigate the Unknown, you'll find dipping in and out of this book deeply nourishing. Though it may also ignite great grief at not having had the information before. There's no way around this. Grieve, read on, grieve some more, possibly rail with anger at only discovering this knowledge now – you won't be the first.

You may just find this is the vital medicine your soul needs to traverse the challenges of menopause. Really, you deserve a book of your own – a book that Alexandra will write one day.

If you're postmenopausal

What can we say to you? For some, this book may be highly relevant, and for others it'll be of no interest at all. If you've lived your life unaware of the power of your menstruality, you may enjoy reading the book and choose to practise menstrual cycle awareness using the moon cycle as your rhythmic guide (see [*Chapter 8*](#)).

That experience will be subtler, but it'll give you a way to explore the power of cyclical consciousness. Many women comment that this menstruality knowledge puts their whole life into a new, kinder and more meaningful perspective that can genuinely heal, empower and fire their postmenopausal years with greater meaning.

If you suffer with menstrual problems

We know many of you have menstrual problems, some of you quite extremely. In this case, you may be feeling a little bleak and hopeless. But take heart – this book offers a vital remedy that, combined with other natural health approaches, has helped many women to transform their experience.

Your menstrual suffering has its roots in cultural denial of the cycle, and the subsequent loss of the knowledge we reveal in this book. Ignoring the cycle puts a strain on our being – psychologically and physically. It's as though all women suffer from low-grade stress to their system because we continually have to override something.

We address this topic fully in [Chapter 8](#). We recommend you join our online Hormone Harmony course (see [Resources](#) section) for specific suggestions for your particular condition. You can find a list of our recommended resources at redschooll.net/resources. We also encourage you to read Alexandra's first book, *The Wild Genie*, in which she describes her own journey from menstrual hell to heaven.

Everyone else

If you have a menstrual cycle but don't identify as a woman. We hope you can bear with our 'feminine empowerment' language for long enough to extract the useful information we offer on the cycle. Clearly your relationship to the menstrual cycle is complex, and not one with which we've had experience. We hope you'll engage with the material here, and let us know what it means to you.

If you're a psychiatrist, psychotherapist, counsellor, coach, or women's health practitioner. While the book is not pitched at professionals, it's crucial to have menstruality knowledge – women are short-changed today because of our failure to name it. This book offers you an extraordinary body of information about the workings of the female psyche, and how to support it.

If you're a sceptic who thinks this menstrual power stuff is a load of old rubbish, this book could just put your blood pressure through the roof. We don't want to be responsible for that, so put it down now and walk away.

If you risk a read anyway, we should tell you that many a sceptic has turned up at one of our workshops (how they made it there in the first place is a mystery) and gone away completely converted, becoming some of our most vocal champions.

If you don't want that possibility to occur, walk away. Alternatively, you could choose to read the book with an open mind. You'll no doubt find yourself arguing with us, but maybe you'll also grudgingly concede a point or two. Or even, dare we say, realize it makes a lot of sense.

We should, however, emphasize that for the book to be truly meaningful, you *do* need to engage with your own cycle in the manner we describe, otherwise you'll remain locked out of the deeper mystery.

Welcoming men

This book is all about how women are wired, and as such, it's directed at women. But if you're a man, we hope you might just peep over your partner's, friend's, sister's or co-worker's shoulder to take a look. Or even have your own copy.

We need you to know about, and become an ally of, the amazing force held in the female body. We need your support in countless ways – including as a protector so women can retreat at menstruation – in order that we might begin to access this power more readily and deeply.

Importantly, we want you to know that as we women recover this power, you too may feel a greater liberation. When this knowledge isn't recognized within society it turns up as trouble – crazy emotions, destructive behaviours and menstrual health problems – all of which impact on *men too*.

The return of this knowledge has the potential to create more harmonious relationships between men and women in general. And you'll learn about the power of the Feminine – about the sanity She can bring to the world, and how to court Her more in your own life.

As a man you could also begin to think about the information in this book in the context of the women in your life. And all the ways in which you too are cyclical: for example, notice your energy pattern through a day, a moon month or through the arc of nature's seasons. Equally, you could see the pattern of The Inner Seasons of the menstrual cycle (you'll read about this in [Chapter 4](#)) in any creative project you're engaged in.

A quick word about language

Throughout the book, we use the word ‘world’ with both a lowercase and an uppercase ‘w’. With the former, we’re speaking of this material reality in which we live – our everyday life. With the latter, we’re referring to a spiritual dimension: we’re speaking about the World as a living presence, alive and engaged with us. It’s a way of addressing the Soul of the World.

We also use the word ‘feminine’ with both a lower and uppercase first letter. With the lower case we’re referring to that which pertains to us as women. With the uppercase, we’re referring to an archetypal power that is in and governs us all, women and men alike.

Let's get started

As you read and engage with the ideas in this book – even wrestle with them – we want you to know that our personal paths with this work haven't been neat and tidy. We've both been well worked by the cycle process but always consciously choose to live by its rhythm, even as our society doesn't properly value it.

It has created tension and challenge on occasion, which in retrospect proved just the creative tension needed to allow the depths of the work to emerge. If you too encounter tension and challenge, take heart – like us, it could just be the proverbial grit in the oyster shell that allows you to create the pearl of your life.





Part I

The Feminine Way

Chapter 1

The Wild Power Revolution

There's something very exciting stirring on the planet. We're noticing it in our day-to-day lives, and seeing glimmers of it in the world around us. In amongst the chaos, suffering and destruction, a healing force is wanting to be known – the power of the Feminine.

This force is quietly at work under the surface, even as we see all around us 'power gone mad' through war, oppression, poverty, inequality, injustice and the wilful destruction of our planet – our very life-support system.

This distorted power is the Masculine run amok. This isn't a comment on men, but on how the human species has lost its way with power. Things have become out of relationship and out of balance.

What's needed is the power of the Feminine. The Feminine is not the solution; rather, it's the Feminine in relationship and harmony with the Masculine that's the way forward, allowing both their full brilliance.

The Feminine is already revealing herself in the growing number of women who are choosing to honour the Feminine Way – cyclical, relational and organic – as they step into their own authority, power and leadership.

Conscious women are setting the pace, demanding to do things on their own terms and modelling a new way to conduct business. They're activists for the Feminine.

THE MISSING PIECE

We believe the menstrual cycle holds a key piece for fuelling this revolution. As women claim their Wild Power – the intelligence within their menstrual cycle – and men meet it, relational consciousness is generated: a consciousness that recognizes all of life as connected and sacred.

The moment you start practising menstrual cycle awareness and encounter this living presence within you (or in another), and let yourself be initiated by the death and rebirth process within it, you reunite with the source that nourishes you, and restore your connection with the natural world, the cycles of life and the divine force of Love.

It's a way of living soulfully, creating a potent channel through which the Feminine can be experienced and integrated back into our lives.

Our Wild Power is the Feminine wanting to be known through our individual experience. It's our personal service to the revolution. Not a revolution imposed on us, but an organic evolution that works through our bodies.

Bringing awareness to our menstrual cycle activates this inner river of transformation and turns our Wild Power into a great and unstoppable force that streams the Feminine back into the fabric of our lives. It affects how we choose to live, and how we conduct business, influence the public sphere and politics, and partner with the environment.

Our Wild Power empowers us to live and organize our lives by our *own* rhythm – following our innate sense of timing and intuitive knowing in concert with nature, rather than being dictated to by that of society. The more of us who get

turned on by Wild Power, the more momentum we have to realize a just, sustainable, abundant and spiritually fulfilling world for all.

So, let's get started on *your* vital role in this Wild Power revolution. To begin with, it requires an important shift in perspective and a willingness to name and validate the menstrual cycle – lifting it out of the shadows and into the foreground.

In this chapter we expose a long-standing myth, broker a truce with your cycle, lay down our one big rule, and introduce a crucial tool that's the key to everything: menstrual cycle awareness. With this knowledge under your belt, you'll be ready to rock the revolution.

'How did I ever live without my cycle? It's my light, my lamp, my direct line.'

SJANIE, DAY 26

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

To kickstart the Wild Power revolution we first have to debunk a myth that's been hanging around and poisoning the atmosphere for far too long. It perpetuates the idea that menstruation, and indeed the entire menstrual cycle, is a handicap or a limitation that makes women emotionally unstable and inconsistent in their behaviour.

While it's true that women *do* change throughout the menstrual month, those changes *do not* equal unreliability or weakness. In fact, having a menstrual cycle gives a woman much more predictability around her moods and energy than someone without one. And it also gives her a wonderful capacity to work with change – that unalterable fact of life that so many of us resist.

As we travel through the menstrual cycle, we experience different sides of our nature, our strengths and our vulnerabilities, and embody different types of skill or power.

For example, logical thinking and use of language are greatly enhanced or more acute at ovulation, while premenstrually, a more knowing, instinctual, intuitive intelligence comes to the fore. This doesn't mean you become a gibbering irrationalist premenstrually; rather, you operate from an intelligence tempered by more feeling and a greater awareness of complexity.

These changes in consciousness and perception throughout the cycle are an amazing resource. When they are known and understood, they can be capitalized on for much greater effectiveness, productivity, creativity and pleasure.

Everything changes

As with any cycle there's a rhythm of activity and rest in the menstrual cycle. One minute you're like Florence Nightingale, tending to the world's needs with ease and grace, and the next you want nothing more than space and time for yourself, and turn into a grouch if someone pesters you for anything.

This is normal, and all very healthy if you respect the changing pattern of the cycle. You're simply being reminded to balance your activity in the world with time to chill and tend to your deeper needs.

However, if you don't respect the powers of each phase of the cycle – and not all are valued by our society (particularly that premenstrual, metaphorical punch) – then it may indeed feel like a limitation. We almost need you to repeat the following mantra out loud to yourself: **The menstrual cycle is not the problem – rather, it's a culture that says women should be a certain way and not another.**

Cycles *do* set natural limits in our lives, reminding us that we can't be all things to all people. We can't keep going 24/7, or avoid more tender, even wounded parts of ourselves and expect to remain sane and healthy. But limits *do not* equal limitations.

In short, the cycle keeps us connected to all facets of our being. It helps us to hone and integrate who we are and let go of who we're not. It's a potential path to freedom. Unless, of course, you suffer from bad symptoms at menstruation, which can indeed feel like a handicap. But in fact, they are indicating something about your overall health. Remember, the cycle itself isn't the problem; instead, it's *revealing* a problem.

To see the cycle as the enemy can set you up for more suffering. But working with and within its rhythmic imperatives can be your foundational

path to healing.

The real limitation comes from not having *any* limits. If you expect yourself to be the same all the time, you'll feel tripped up by your cycle. Once you understand the wisdom of the cyclical process, and learn to value all the facets of yourself it reveals – a skill this book aims to teach you – you'll feel liberated and excited about capitalizing on the superpowers that are unleashed. Cycle-smart women really do have the edge.

'Everything I see today is wrong. Talk about falling with a thump off the high summer train.'

SJANIE, DAY 19

LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR CYCLE

We hope you can ditch the aforementioned mad myth and get on with the important work of recovering your cyclical power. All cycles of life affect us, and it's recognized today that rhythmical life is vital for the healthy functioning of our body and soul.

Let's think about some of the cycles in our lives. The most obvious are seasonal, circadian (our day/night rhythm) and ultradian rhythms (occurring over a 90–120-minute cycle). And of course our menstrual cycle: the one we've been taught can be ignored; in fact, the one that we *must* ignore if we want to get ahead.

Even today, with everything we now know about the cycles of life and our health, we still get conned into imagining our menstrual cycle isn't worth caring for in the way we would, say, our circadian rhythm.

Everyone, including men, can usually relate to how it feels to have a disturbed circadian rhythm – we feel generally low, irritable and unwell. In the same way, a disturbed menstrual cycle creates problems. Interestingly, the symptoms of interrupted sleep patterns, insomnia and jet lag are not unlike some PMS symptoms.

On your journey to menstrual wellbeing and deep empowerment, your most important step is to value and, dare we say, love the fact of your cycle, working with it as best you can within the circumstances of your life.

For some of you this idea might be a stretch, especially if you suffer from debilitating menstrual problems. But your capacity to, at the very least, 'broker an uneasy truce' with your cycle is the first and most crucial step to unlocking

the amazing inner resources of your Wild Power. This uneasy truce could just grow into a deep trust of the cycle, and yourself. We've seen it happen over and over again. The following story is one moving example of learning to love the cycle:

'My relationship with myself has changed. It's gentler, more tender and more precious than it's ever been. This is a really remarkable change – it seems unbelievable, in fact, because I've been searching for this for a long time.'

'What is so strange to me is that the intellectual content of what I've learnt is minimal, while the emotional content is huge. The power of addressing these issues in a group of women, and paying loving attention to myself and my cycle, has been extraordinary. It's not as if I wasn't paying attention before... it's valuing and loving my cycle that's new.'

LILY

LEARNING MENSTRUAL CYCLE AWARENESS (MCA)

Like meditation, the simple act of getting to know your own menstrual cycle, and charting (recording) its progression on a daily basis, builds inner spaciousness and mindfulness into your life.

Menstrual cycle awareness (or MCA) is a spiritual practice and the ultimate mindfulness tool for women. As you feel and respond to your changing mood and energy throughout the phases of the cycle, you'll experience increasing inner warmth or kindness, more flexibility, choice, and a growing sense of integration and coherence that will help you feel more alive and *in* yourself. This is the mysterious 'X factor' that allows a woman to feel just right, clear and well.

If you don't practise cycle awareness you'll be left adrift in a sea of possibility and potential – with a head full of information but shut out of the realization of these inner powers. MCA is both startlingly obvious and simple and surprisingly challenging.

'I feel a lot more grounded in myself and with my life now that I've developed a better and improving relationship with my menstrual cycle. I'm more aware and mindful of my feelings and emotions, and how the external world affects my internal world.'

'I have a stronger trust with myself... I'm excited about the future. In fact, before, I hated my period and now I wish I bled for longer because during that time, I've actually tuned in to euphoric feelings.'

LISA D

Over time, MCA builds what we call your inner vessel, or 'container'. This helps you establish boundaries and feel more stable in your self – a place within where you can 'rest'.

MCA also helps you develop the vital skill of what we call ‘holding the tension’ – the capacity to sit with all the complexities, challenges and fullness of who you are within the vicissitudes of the world.

Holding the tension reduces reactive behaviour and feelings of overwhelm, and brings increasing levels of presence and creativity to any situation. We explore this practice fully in [Chapter 9](#), as it’s one of the most important ones to cultivate. For now, we want to flag it as one of the outcomes of cycle awareness.

We encourage you to start practising MCA right away, to discover your own version of what we’re sharing here. Below, we’ve outlined its basic steps. In [Chapter 8](#) we go into considerable further detail on the practice, sharing some of the subtle nuances that you can master as time goes on, and offering suggestions for adapting it to your circumstances.

MCA: THE BASICS

Menstrual cycle awareness is your core Wild Power practice. It allows you to get to know your unique rhythm of power and learn how to live in sync with it, heal your menstrual symptoms, and awaken your personal Wild Power revolution.

Here's how to do it:

- Create a month-at-a-glance menstrual chart. Go to www.redschool.net/menstrual-chart to download our free Red School menstrual chart. Alternatively, you can draw up your own chart, or use one of the many apps available.
- On your chart, record which day of the cycle you're on. Day 1 is the first day of bleeding (this doesn't include the spotting that can occur for some women before the full flow begins).
- At the end of each day of your cycle, record on your chart your dominant feelings, your dreams, your energy levels, and so on.
- Start a new menstrual chart at the beginning of your next cycle.
- Alongside the simple daily charting described above, you may also enjoy keeping a journal in which you record more detailed observations, including synchronicities, sexual energies, themes, arguments and insights. At the very least, maintain basic daily observations, including writing them down.

We notice that the women who get the most out of MCA are those who take the time to do the practice above every day. But don't worry if you forget the odd day – it can often happen around ovulation when you may find you're less reflective; or at any other time for that matter. Just pick it up again and keep going.

'From the first few weeks I began charting, it felt like a life woke up within me – something that up until that point had been in the shadows. As the weeks grew into months and I continued to shine a light on it, I was surprised to find that this inner cycle of life began responding more strongly and clearly.'

'I was coming into relationship with a life within that felt holy and sacred. Now I feel the presence of this life rhythm as a trusty friend, my closest companion, leading me on a monthly journey of discovery towards greater wholeness... if I care to listen, that is. I feel full of awe and gratitude, and can relax into this ancient inner rhythm that I'm now in love with.'

CLAIRE B

The Big Red Rule

We have only one rule for this menstruality work, and we call it our Big Red Rule. It simply states that:

YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE TRUMPS ANYTHING WE MIGHT SAY

Drop any expectation that you 'should' experience the cycle in a certain way. There's an 'archetypal cycle' (which we explain below), and through practising MCA you'll discover your own personal version of that, and how it reveals your talents, strengths and vulnerabilities. Got it?

INFLUENCES ON YOUR CYCLE

Our teachings are not an exact science but an art forged out of deep engagement with the cycle. We describe the undeniable, organic pattern at the heart of nature and our bodies that you'll all recognize – let's call it the Archetypal Cycle.

The Archetypal Cycle imposes limits – a certain discipline – that act as a 'container' and a reference point from which to act. However, what we can't account for is what happens when your unique nature, constitution, life situation and Calling meet the Archetypal Cycle. There are going to be similarities among us but also differences.

Each of you will have your own take on the Archetypal Cycle, and that will reflect the uniqueness of who you are. This work is *not* meant to be prescriptive. Your experience of the cycle will be shaped by a number of things:

The status of your overall health

The more sensitive your immune and nervous system, the more acutely you may feel the changes through the cycle, and perhaps feel challenged by them on occasion.

Your character and personal history

Your strengths and vulnerabilities mean that there are places in the cycle where you're naturally more comfortable, and others where you're not. This is normal. In fact, we even speak of having a 'natural home' in the cycle.

For some women that's the ovulatory time; there's a lot to like about this socially acceptable phase. However, for some women it's overwhelming, and once they cross into the second half of their cycle, into the premenstruum, they feel themselves relax. It's as if they're home again – they know who they are and what to do.

So, try to love your nature and celebrate the parts of the cycle that you feel easiest in. Capitalize on this, but also bring conscious attention to the parts where you feel lost, uneasy or undone.

Your lifestyle practices

If your self-care practices are a little thin on the ground – for example, if you don't eat healthy food regularly, you sleep badly or fail to exercise – your cycle will have something to say about it, and it may not be that friendly.

As you improve your self-care habits you'll feel more attuned to the subtleties of your cycle process, and able to allow the cosmic forces to blow open within you.

Your age

The stage you're at in life will affect your experience of the cycle. If you're in your 20s, you'll probably be more attuned to the preovulatory powers.

Sjanie, who is on the cusp of 40, is in the full flowering of the summer of her life and completely loves the action, the fullness and the possibilities of this time. A woman in her 40s really starts to 'get' and potentially enjoy the full force of the premenstruum.

Your relationships

These can provide both challenge and opportunity for your cycle experience. The challenge is not being able to exclusively follow the rhythmic demand of your cycle because you're negotiating the presence of another person.

On the other hand, if your partner is supportive, he or she can be a real guardian of the menstrual time, carrying the extra load in the home and giving you the deep space and time you need. And you have the possibility of experiencing the most exquisite union just before bleeding that can bring a new dimension to your relationship. You'll learn about this in [Chapters 5](#) and [7](#).

Your children

Negotiating the realities of family life while caring for yourself and your cycle is a topic that requires a book of its own, and Sjanie hopes to write that one day. It can be an intense challenge because your children's needs don't quietly pack up and go away when you need to withdraw at menstruation. On the contrary, children, sensing that mum is subtly 'retreating', can up the ante.

At this stage, suffice it to say, you need to show yourself immense kindness and concentrate on giving yourself 1 per cent of what you most need; this has a way of growing. You'll find out about the '1 per cent shift' practice in [Chapter 9](#).

The larger cycles of life

You're affected by many different cycles all the time – among them the phases of the moon, the yearly seasons and astrological changes – and this impacts your menstrual cycle experience. For example, menstruating on a dark moon can have a quite different feel to bleeding on a full moon; and menstruating on, say, the dark moon in winter can take you even deeper.

Amber, a high sensitive, has to be acutely conscious not just of her menstrual cycle, but also of the moon phases and the seasonal round, in particular the solstices. If she's bleeding on a full moon at the summer solstice and is not mindful of this line-up – and not prepared with childcare and other support – her fuses can blow. If she can experience it consciously, it becomes a wide open, ecstatic and visionary time.

Your gender identity

Some transgender men, genderqueers and nonbinary people have periods too, and their experience of the cycle will hold a unique complexity of feeling. We don't have experience of this and would be interested to learn more.

Your level of commitment

Your willingness and ability to stay tuned in to your cycle will reflect how much you're able to get from it. The more you commit to and respect the cycle's rhythm, the more you can deepen into its riches. It's a resource that you can choose how much or how little you want to delve into.

THERE'S NO 'PERFECT CYCLE'

Please consider this book as a guide with which to dive into your own menstrual journey. The clear and useful instructions it contains are training wheels that you can remove once you have the hang of this cycling lark and can freewheel your own way along.

They are *not* a set of implacable rules for you to live by. This is a story handed from woman to woman, and it's for each woman to make sense of, evolve or adapt the knowledge within the context of her life and what's important to her.

The Big Red Rule is the antidote to perfectionist tendencies – the need to get things right which can undo us. There's no right way to 'do' the cycle. This is always a work of engagement, and the real magic emerges from that. You may feel torn between wanting a cycle that's healthy and looks 'right', with no menstrual problems, and having the cycle you have without making yourself 'wrong' or inadequate.

That's where our Big Red Rule comes in. It asks you to really feel and experience the cycle you have – with all its complexity, challenge and eccentricity – and to craft meaning from that. This could well be the ticket to healing any menstrual problems.

In an ideal world – one in which the cycle is deeply valued – we'd all be able to experience the most exalted states of being – such as bliss, ecstasy, oneness and love – naturally, if we so chose. But the world is not yet set up to support us to have that, so it's crucial not to judge yourself if you don't experience it.

The message we want to get across is that it's the process of your cycle, not only the content, that's important.

Regardless of all the powers we name throughout this book, it's your experience of your own cycle – your process of engagement with it – that over time generates the real magic.

You build psychological muscle, which brings the powers alive, making them meaningful and useful to you.

In summary, it's time to repeat after us: 'There's no perfect cycle.' But clearly, if your cycle is very irregular, difficult or painful, we encourage you to seek appropriate naturopathic help. But please don't think you've failed in some way. We want you to begin by saying 'yes' to the cycle you have: accepting it as it is. Ordain it as holy, because in that moment you create space for the experience of your life to fill you.

And therein lies the magic of your menstrual cycle. It's a custom-built path that serves you if you cherish it and honour the intimacy of your own experience. This is the Big Red Rule in action.

'Jeeez, the intensity and vividness of my night-time dreaming has just gone up a notch or few!'

SJANIE, DAY 22

The revolution is an inside job

As you begin to practise awareness of your menstrual cycle, you fire up the revolution naturally. MCA awakens your female initiatory journey to power, and in following it you also serve the world. It's really important to remember that this path, your spiritual way, is an inside job. By that we mean you're initiated from *within* – it's happening *to* you rather than being something you *do*.

You don't have to impose rigorous regimes on yourself – there's no fasting, sweating, pushing or any other tough practices. You simply have to engage with your cycle, believe in the changing pattern of mood and energy as meaningful, and learn to love it.



Chapter 2

Discovering Your Wild Power

In this chapter, we embark on our journey into the heart of Wild Power. First, though, we'll share more about what we mean by the phrase Wild Power. We'll explain how you can come to know it through the magic of your menstrual cycle and the distinctive process of initiation, from menarche to menopause.

We'll also shed some light on an 'old' story about power, one that makes clear the necessity and urgency for women to reclaim *our* ways – for the sake of us all.

WHAT IS WILD POWER?

Think of Wild Power as a living presence that's seeking expression through you. It's your Calling, and it longs to be embodied and expressed through the singularity of who you are. It's an unnameable, unknowable mystery at the heart of your being. It's on your side; it's your individual way in the ocean of possibility.

Wild Power becomes 'embodied' through the process and practice of menstrual cycle awareness over time. Embodied Wild Power is the liberated expression of who you are. It's the culmination of wisdom that you begin to live by, the peace that you make with who you are, and the freedom to express your creativity in the world. It's the revelation of your awakened self, restoring you to a feeling of belonging in the World.

Wild Power is both a stabilizing presence and a catalysing force to evolve and realize your deepest self and highest potential.

It can't be controlled or mastered – your ego doesn't have a say in it. And therein lies Wild Power's brilliance: it has an imperative to keep you true to yourself, an agenda that no amount of arguing with can change. It's this quality that makes it initiatory.

The menstrual cycle creates the 'container' – the necessary limits, tasks and rhythm – through which Wild Power can flow and work to forge your psychological growth and spiritual maturity. Present within you from the moment you're conceived, Wild Power lies dormant until your first bleed at menarche, when it announces itself and begins to inform and orchestrate your life path.

During your menstruating years, as you engage with your cycle and court your Wild Power, an intimate presence of Love is able to take up residence within you and infuse your life with purpose and meaning. At menopause you're offered the opportunity of wholeheartedly inhabiting that Love and claiming the full authority of your Wild Power.

'The richness and Love that I felt at menstruation is overflowing from me now. I'm beaming. Dancing. Celebrating.'

SJANIE, DAY 13

THE BIRTHINGS – GATEWAYS OF INITIATION

On your initiatory journey to embodying and realizing your Wild Power, you pass through a series of developmental stages, or 'birthings'. These pivotal moments move you from one level of consciousness to another, more expanded, level.

Each 'birthing' requires some kind of sacrifice, an ending – 'a death' – followed by a beginning – 'a birth' – into a new level of awareness. For women, these peak moments of initiation are **menarche**, the **monthly menstruation (including pregnancy and birth)** and **menopause**.

On the following illustration, the '[birthings](#)' are shown as concentric circles that represent the gateways on your journey of initiation. They start with your actual birth at the centre, then your first bleed at menarche, then your monthly menstruation (including pregnancy and birth), and the final birthing of menopause. A description of each of these 'birthings' follows.

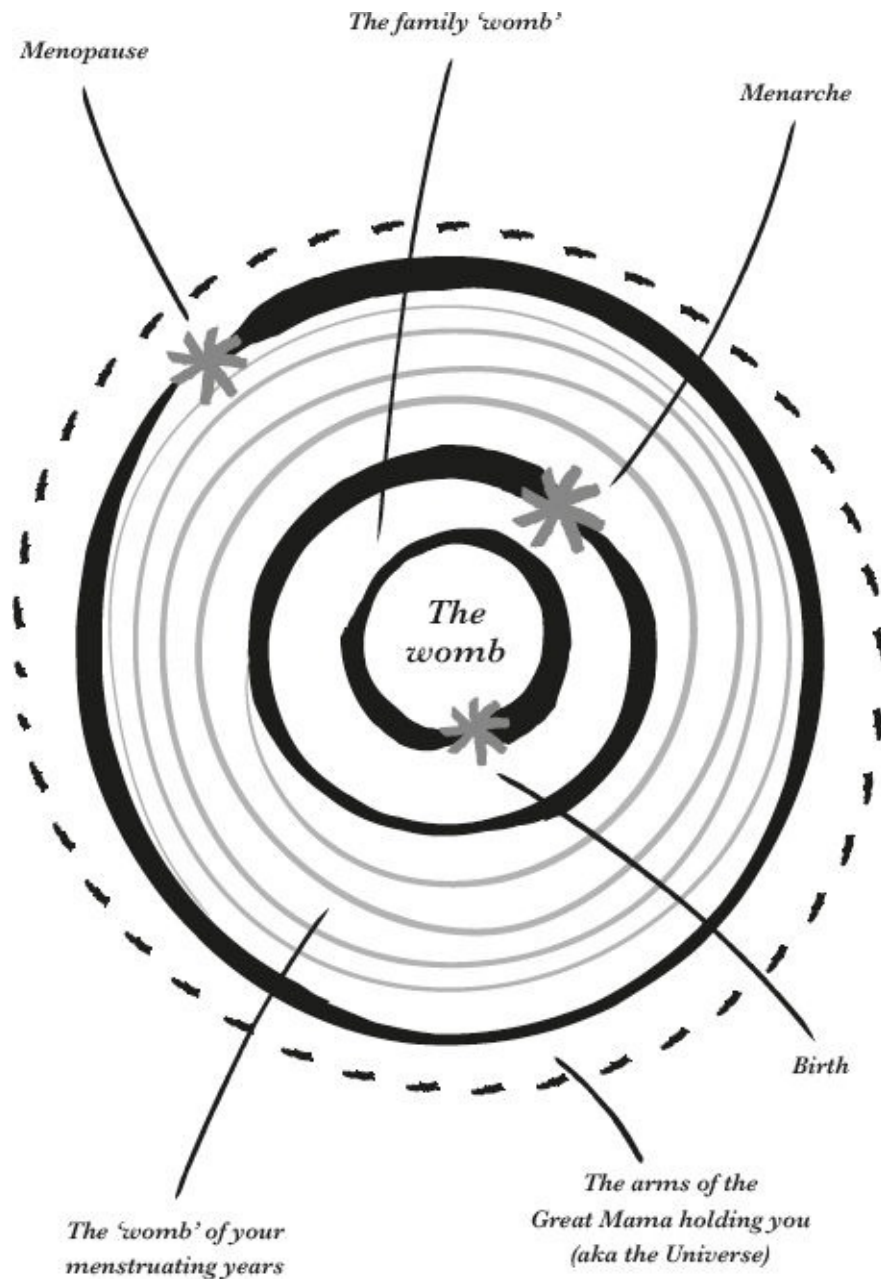
Menarche

When you're conceived, something unutterably unique comes into being. Initially, this unique essence of you is held within the safe embrace of your mother's womb. You're then born into the metaphorical womb of your family, whatever shape or form that takes. Within that family womb you pass through many different and crucial stages of growth and development.

In this first part of your life you grow and slowly separate from your mother, father, caregivers and family to establish the beginnings of your own separate identity and path. Your Wild Power is present but dormant at this time, waiting for you to develop sufficient skills, knowledge and maturity to meet it.

The formal moment of announcement of your Calling – when you step onto *your* path – is at menarche.

At your first period, your Wild Power awakens and begins to stir you. It's like a tiny seed breaking open in the earth and starting to put up its young shoot.



The birthings

On the surface it appears as if not much has changed – and indeed it probably hasn't – but in that moment there's an extraordinary psychic opening that you, as the young girl, have to negotiate. You're suddenly made more permeable (sensitive and responsive) to the larger forces of the World. It's as if the World

steps forward to meet and engage with you. It's not uncommon for highly sensitive girls to experience psychic phenomena around this time.

Menarche is a girl's first 'vision quest' moment. A vision quest is an initiation that awakens us to the vision, or purpose, for our life. Traditionally, boys go into nature alone on their quest for a vision. But for girls it happens spontaneously around menarche. Often, a vision for a girl's life may come in dreams around her first period. (It's well worth paying attention to a girl's dreams at this time, and even encouraging her to keep a dream diary.)

Then, each month as you menstruate, that 'dream' or 'vision' will keep 'speaking' to you in some way. Menarche signals our entrance into 'menstruality consciousness'. Your Calling has been ignited – untainted, and not limited by what culture or family expect of you. That pure, unadulterated wild spirit – your Wild Power – begins its formal journey to find full expression in the world.

Of course, your young psyche is not conscious of the full impact of this moment. But unconsciously, a big shift occurs as you make this transition from girl to woman. You're 'birthed' into a larger 'womb' – the containing presence of the menstrual cycle. The female process of initiation has formally begun.

Your fertile years

With the ignition of your fertile years you enter what we call a ‘wombing process’. You’re held within a predictable pattern – the rhythm of your cycle – which, over your menstruating years, forges a feeling of containment that we liken to being held by a womb. Through the ongoing process of the menstrual cycle, month after month, your Calling starts to land and take on a recognizable shape in the world.

Through the wombing process your cycle helps you to work through and integrate your history and life experiences. It turns the grit of your life – the challenges, disappointments, heartaches and struggles – into the gold of your power.

Each month at menstruation you negotiate yet another ‘birthing’ as you move through a mini ego death (a feeling of losing yourself) and are reborn into a potentially new iteration of yourself. Menstruation anchors you in the initiatory process and keeps you on course as your Calling is re-ignited each time you bleed.

The monthly dynamic of the cycle is one of growth and abatement, building up and breaking down. The energy tide comes in and then retreats, revealing more and more of the buried treasures within.

What we call ‘The Inner Seasons’ of the cycle – the phases of menstruation, pre-ovulation, ovulation and the premenstruum – reveal different aspects of who you are. So you can enjoy an ongoing discovery of the different sides of your self, personal qualities, talents and strengths.

This underlying, abiding rhythm of expansion and contraction and movement through The Inner Seasons is a process of self-development – you discover, test

and refine your power. It's the initiatory work of your menstruating years. (You'll learn about The Inner Seasons in [Part II](#)).

Menopause

Menopause is the final ignition of your Calling – a transition that births you from the holding of your ‘womb’ into the ‘womb of the World’. If you’ve been following the wombing process consciously, you’ll sense you’ve outgrown this cyclical skin, as though it were too tight and now cramps your style.

You’re finally big enough to go it alone: you know yourself, you know your business, and you can seriously pack some punch. Although you may be ready to leap out of this old skin, without doubt there will be a part of you screaming ‘Nooooo!’ because it’s a step into the Great Unknown and that can be a little scary.

During menopause you may go through a time of feeling abandoned as you lose the familiarity of your menstrual cycle and leave behind your fertile years. It’s the ‘death’ moment in this final stage of the menstruality initiatory journey. It’s time to go beyond the confines of the cycle now, to become the full revelation of your Wild Power in service of the World.

UNMASKING POWER

Are you scared of power – in yourself or in others? Do you suppress your own power? Are you afraid that claiming your power means you'll oppress or diminish someone else? Do you see power as a destructive force that's outside your control?

Too many of us are afraid of our power and have pretty messed-up notions about it. Given the many displays of distorted power in the world today, it's easy to see how we might assume that power is the problem. The distortion of power in our culture arises, in part, because we forget that weakness and vulnerability are necessary. These qualities only appear weak because of our one-sided view of power.

We currently see power as perfection – tough and hard, insensitive, unemotional, untouchable and bulletproof. The tender, apparently fragile, emotionally messy, inept, imperfect or immature parts of ourselves are all perceived as weak and powerless. However, these vulnerabilities are at the heart of our humanity.

They're the doorway to a wholesome, integrated, wise expression of power that brings compassion and respect to other people, along with a cooperative and respectful relationship with the natural world that supports us.

What transforms apparent 'weakness' is dignifying and ordaining it as meaningful and powerful. For it *is* meaningful and powerful. It's worth considering that the parts of you that you think of as powerless and useless are all places of power that have not yet been recognized, loved and lived – they are vital for you and for life itself.

'The terror that exists in holding full power continues to overwhelm and intrigue me.'

Lou

As we've wrestled with the notion of power in our own lives, we've been repeatedly tripped up by the seduction of distorted power. In the short term it can feel good: it also looks effective, efficient and impressive. Distorted power is sold to us as certainty, offering boundaries and safety. It appeals to the child in us that's not ready to take responsibility.

THE POWER OF THE FEMININE

Honouring the power of the Feminine is difficult – it demands something from us. It asks us to meet, engage and take personal responsibility for our part in any given situation. The Feminine interrupts the status quo to create change and birth something new. By its very nature, it's initiatory. Initially, it can feel like a death, provoking and challenging us to our core.

It can seem easier to ignore our feminine power in the short term because we can hide, avoid change or be vulnerable, and make what's wrong be about everyone and everything else. While the Feminine might feel challenging, Her presence on the planet is non-negotiable. She's here, ready or not. She'll either show up as big trouble or we'll meet Her as worthy channels for Her brilliance, beauty, medicine, revelation and creativity.

When we speak of the Feminine, we're not imaging a goddess figure but rather a presence, a process – a way of being that needs to be cultivated so She can be known and experienced.

This way of being is our capacity to relate: to meet life as an equal partner. It's not something within our control, or that we're a victim of. Instead, with the Feminine we're party to and part of an unfolding story that fundamentally serves all of life.

We need the Feminine because She leads the evolutionary edge. She's the veiled mystery that cannot be named but calls us all the time through life's disturbances, yearnings and synchronicities.

She's known through the gaps, the empty spaces in our lives – and our constant doing and producing can shut the door to Her. We don't control Her, we can't *do*

Her; She does us. It's because of this that we're always in safe hands.

The Feminine is Wisdom: the ineffable, invisible, intangible presence without which life is rendered soulless. We women have a crucial role to play in restoring the Feminine and creating a new, life-affirming power story – our Wild Power revolution.

Women are the archetypal anchors for the power of the Feminine, and when we reclaim our feminine power – by restoring our ways and practices – we integrate the power of the Feminine into our lives and back onto the planet.

Central to our ways as women is the embodied practice of the menstrual cycle (menstrual cycle awareness). As each woman works with her own cycle, and builds trust in its process and power, she develops an intimate trust in the power of the Feminine.

The repetitive, inescapable, direct access to our vulnerability that we feel each menstrual month delivers us to our edges and pops the bubble of illusion that we're invincible and separate – the 'old' story of power – and restores a profound sense of love and belonging.

Through the process of the menstrual cycle, our being is both affirmed and challenged. This combination creates a more coherent power story for each woman – the potency of which goes beyond the individual. Each one of us embodying our Wild Power is like a living prayer for the Feminine.

History makes it clear that no one is exempt from abuse of power. There's no guarantee you'll use your power wisely. But we're convinced that the menstrual cycle is our best bet, as women, to make sense of power and train ourselves to be wiser custodians of it.

There are many ways in which the cycle helps us to do this – and we unpack

these throughout the book – but the key mechanism is the premenstrual ‘deflation’ our ego undergoes each month. In short, we have an in-built antidote to invincibility and hubris.

Power is always a step ahead of us – we’re always negotiating and learning about it, tripped up by it and growing into it. We have to get smart. We have to come into a respectful relationship with power, and practise a mindful discipline around it. And awareness of your menstrual cycle *is* this mindful discipline.

So, let’s befriend power, embrace the menstrual cycle and create a new power story. Let’s learn how to become wise channels, for our own sake and that of the world.





Part II

Three Inner Maps
for Your
Initiatory Journey

[Chapter 3](#)

[The Two Vias](#)

There are three inner ‘maps’ within the menstrual cycle – The Two *Vias*, The Inner Seasons and The Five Chambers of Menstruation. These are the maps for discovering your menstrual cycle and guiding you on your menstruality initiatory journey, leading you to your Wild Power.

Together, the three maps tutor you in specific ‘powers’. They are the means by which you get to know the exquisite detail of your cycle, learn to trust in the power of the Feminine, and embody the new power story (see [Chapter 2](#)).

In this part of the book, we look at the three inner maps in turn, and give a visual representation of each, beginning with The Two *Vias*.

INTRODUCING THE MAP OF THE TWO VIAS

The [map of The Two Vias](#) describes the two currents of energy within the menstrual cycle – expansion (menstruation to ovulation) and contraction (ovulation to menstruation) – and the fulcrums where they meet: menstruation and ovulation.

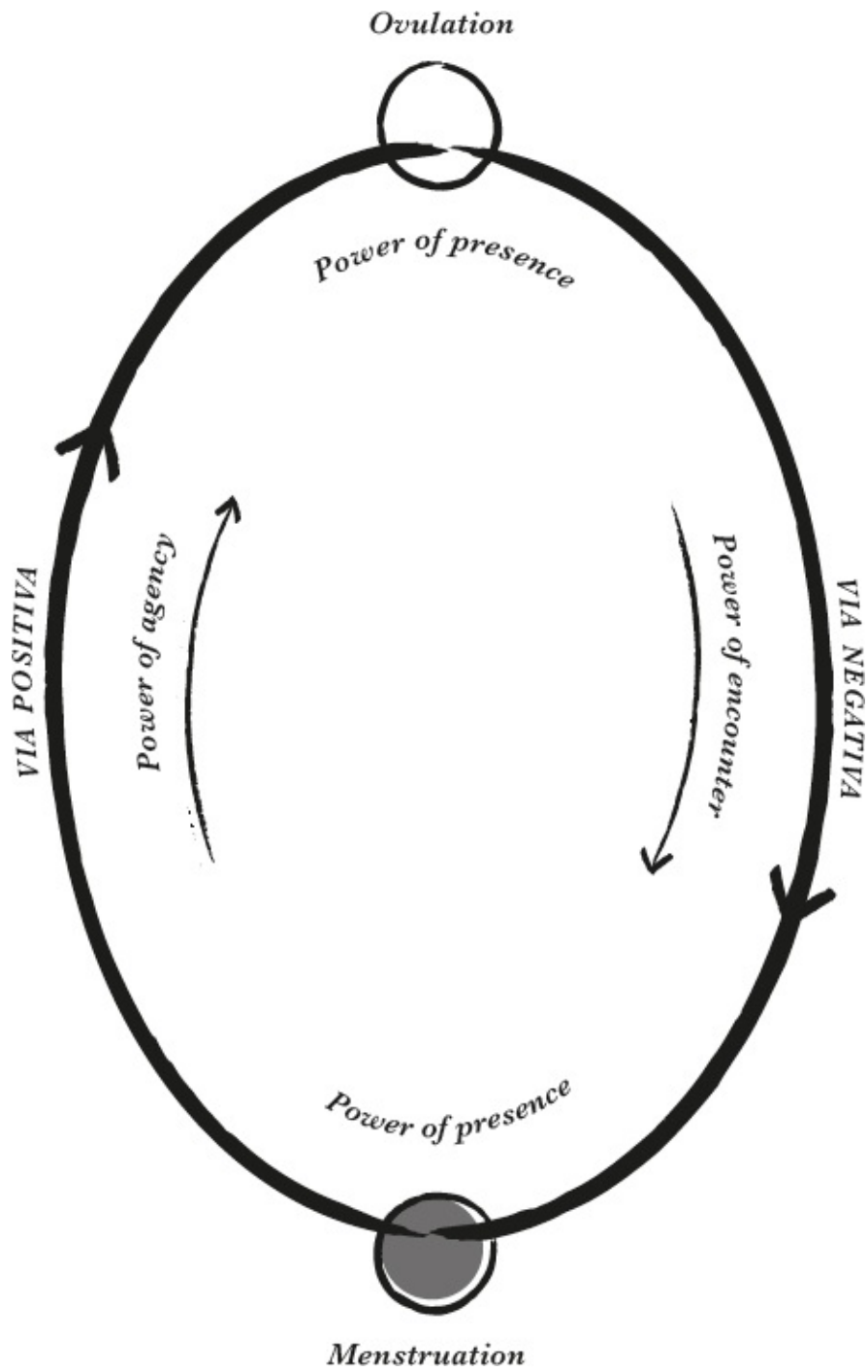
These energy currents are the archetypal forces of the Masculine and Feminine, the yang and yin. We call them The Two Vias: the *via positiva* (the first half of the cycle) and the *via negativa* (the second half of the cycle).

The three archetypal powers

By consciously engaging with the map of The Two Vias (the practice box at the end of this chapter offers suggestions on how to get started), you'll receive your first layer of tutoring in two 'archetypal powers' – the **power of agency** (the *via positiva*) and the **power of encounter** (the *via negativa*) – and grow into the third one: the **power of presence** (which is amplified at menstruation and ovulation).

Let's take a look at the three 'archetypal powers' (you'll see them on the map opposite).

- The **power of agency** is an active power in which you take charge and shape your own destiny. It's power as a tool. Imposing an agenda on the world, you operate out of the known, out of the impulse in the moment. This is 'power over'.
- The **power of encounter** is a passive power that's receptive and relational. Instead of stepping forward, you metaphorically and energetically step back and allow something to come towards you. It's not about imposing your will, but rather being willing to serve something beyond you. This is 'power with'.
- The skill of being able to live both the power of agency and the power of encounter awakens the **power of presence** – an expanded state of consciousness that's inclusive, fully awake and liberated. The power of presence is your capacity to be with change, in concert with the dance between the Masculine and Feminine.



Map of The Two Vias

The power of presence comes through you and restores you to a larger **Presence**. Presence is the ability to hold ‘inner spaciousness’: to become a channel for creative expression and true choice (rather than habitual reactions). Presence generates love and self-acceptance. This is ‘power from within’.

Engaging with the map of The Two *Vias* helps you to grow down into and fully embody these three power dynamics. You’ll learn the ability to consciously wield and court your power, and come to know that your loving presence *is* your power.

WHAT ARE THE TWO VIAS?

As you can see in the illustration of the map above, The Two *Vias* – the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* – are the outer ‘frame’ of the cycle process. They are your connection to the two forces of creation, the Masculine and the Feminine.

These forces are revealed in the timeless energy pattern of expansion and contraction that underpins your menstrual cycle. The pattern is mirrored in the seasons of the year, the phases of the moon, even in the energy of the day.

As you become conscious of this rhythmic pattern within the intimacy of your cycle, you begin to become attuned to the forces of creation and of your being. You awaken and strengthen different capacities and ways of working and knowing – the powers of agency and encounter (*see above*). It’s the foundation of crafting your power.

To understand The Two *Vias*, it’s necessary first to have a grasp of the basic energy pattern within the cycle. What follows is a description of this pattern, and how it gives rise to The Two *Vias*. Then we dive into an exploration of The Two *Vias* themselves.

THE TWO POLES OF THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Think of your cycle as having two poles to it: the pole of menstruation and the pole of ovulation (see [Map of The Two Vias](#)). These are like the North and South Pole of your being. At each pole something happens – at menstruation you bleed and at ovulation you release an egg. And in between these two activities, your being is in transition.

Menstruation and ovulation are, psychologically speaking, potentially the most stable, grounded, cruisey times of the menstrual month. There's a subtle feeling of arrival, achievement and release.

The 'transition' times of pre-ovulation and premenstruum are more dynamic and less stable than menstruation and ovulation, because your spirit is 'travelling' from one state to another. Where there's transition, there's more potential for emotional turbulence, unease and doubt to slip into your being.

The importance of paying attention to your cycle and your natural tendencies is more crucial in the transitional phases, whereas at ovulation and menstruation it can feel easier to be present and relaxed.

The cycle process is a pattern of tension and release, activity and rest, of assertion and restraint. This shifting of energy currents maintains a quality of attentiveness and engagement in your system, which allows it to renew and recalibrate so you don't become hardened and insensitive.

While menstruation and ovulation are both places of greater stability, psychologically, your energy and attention are doing two very different things at these times. Attention, as Susan Pearse and Martina Sheehan of the organization Mind Gardener remind us, is the animating force, it brings something alive.⁴

- **At menstruation your attention is drawn inwards**, which amplifies your inner life.
- **At ovulation your attention is drawn outwards**, which amplifies your place in the world – how you connect with others, what you do and accomplish.

As well as the basic pattern of inner and outer focus of attention, your physical energy changes too. At menstruation it's at its lowest – as though all your chi has been drawn inwards – not unlike the season of winter. At ovulation your energy can reach a peak of activity and exuberance, not unlike the plenitude of summer.

The pole of menstruation

As you enter into the heart of menstruation, you go into the deep winter: the midnight hour or the dark moon of your soul, where all is quiet and still. At this time we say that all the outer 'lights' of the world – that is, your attention to mundane or material life – have been dimmed and your inner 'lights' are now blazing.

These inner lights are the awakening of your feelings, your needs, and the calling of your soul. Hallelujah, the moment of utter presence to yourself – of putting yourself first and others second – has arrived. It can be an extraordinary illumination, exposing all that lies in the shadows of you: the uncared for, the unacknowledged, *and* your beauty, wholeness and belonging to something larger.

As you emerge from menstruation, the balance of 'light' begins to shift: your inner lights slowly dim and your outer lights come up. It's like emerging from winter into spring, when the days gradually get longer and the nights shorter.

Along with this, your energy begins to rise – almost like a wave building to carry you out. You're returning. After a sojourn in the deep inner cave of utter presence to yourself – let's call it the Red Tent time of your soul – you're in an expansion phase. You're ready to engage with the business of your material life and be wholeheartedly present to those around you with renewed vigour and attentiveness.

The first half of the cycle is a rising current of natural motivation, focus, and enthusiasm to recommit to your life activities. And you'll probably notice higher levels of tolerance and optimism at this time, too. The inner 'lights' are dimming more and the outer 'lights' are increasingly becoming stronger and brighter, reaching their peak at ovulation – the high summer or full moon of your spirit.

The pole of ovulation

At this time, you move from an exquisite intimacy and inner silence within yourself at menstruation to feeling fully ‘out there’ and on top of the world – even Queen of the World, as some women have described it – at ovulation. You can feel invincible, as though you could live forever. It’s a powerful declaration of yourself in the world.

At ovulation, you’re wired for the full manifestation of who you are, your work, your Calling – it’s a clear declaration of your Wild Power. Your focus is more on others and less on yourself, and it’s easier to ignore or override your own feelings and needs. In all honesty, it’s as though you don’t *have* needs, which is why mothering, in particular, can feel effortless at ovulation. You can truly imagine that you’re superwoman. However, glorious as it is, trying to maintain this as a permanent state is an illusion.

‘It’s like I’m teetering at the top of a mountain, realizing that the only way now is down.’

SJANIE, DAY 15

During a workshop, whenever we ask women if they’d like to remain at ovulation all the time, they cry, ‘It would be a nightmare. We’d burn out.’ They – and you – would indeed. You’d become numb and deadened, lose your connection to yourself and run out of energy. Addictions would kick in – you’d be grabbing coffee, a sugary treat or whatever else to keep you going.

It’s unsustainable, but fortunately for you, your menstrual cycle’s got your back. She says: Okay, it’s great: you’ve been out there doing a gazillion things, achieving stuff, caring for others. But now you’ve got to come home to yourself again. You’ve got to check in and see if all that you’ve been doing is truly what you want to be doing. And I’m also going to make sure you have the most

blissed-out, soothed downtime ever.

What brilliant design that is. It's like having an über-wise mother caring for you.

A CHANGE IN GEAR

And so you leave that ovulatory moment of the cycle. It can be poignant – a momentary grief or depression, a sudden drop in energy, a feeling of vulnerability. It turns out that you *do* have limits after all.

The cycle process reverses. The contraction – drawing in – begins, the energy retreats and the axis of your attention shifts onto you once again. You're now travelling back into the 'dark' – the dimming of the outer 'lights' – to find your inner 'lights' again.

'I'm riding the long, slow, deep exhalation: down, down, down into my soft sensing animal body.'

SJANIE, DAY 19

If you're unaware of and unable to accommodate this shift in the 'light', emotional reactivity such as irritability and anger can occur. You might feel increasing levels of disconnect and loss of meaning, and even descend into a very real darkness or depression.

However, if you *are* aware of the shift in energy from outer to inner, and are able to negotiate it, you can feel your inner world expanding (those inner 'lights' coming up) – as if you're dropping into a deeper and wider place inside.

It's not unlike moving down through the gear shift of a car, as you engage with a deeper layer of authority and power. Or, as one woman liked to call it, the 'Don't Mess with Me' self. Rather than a descent into darkness, you step into a greater presence within yourself, as the inner 'lights' come up.

And there's a rather extraordinary, and tangible, moment of stepping into the Light just before bleeding. We tell you all about this in the following chapters: it's knowledge that we need to unpack in stages with you. For now, we simply want to alert you to something quite special that awaits you in the crossover time to the bleed.

The gifts of the second half of the cycle

During the second half of the cycle you operate from the perspective of greater self-awareness and connection to your needs and *actual* energy. The result is a more discerning, targeted, efficient way of working, as your inner ‘lights’ bring increased clarity and insight. While your tolerance and optimism levels might dip, you’ll notice a rise in your ability for ‘crap detection’.

This is one of the upsides of increased permeability (sensitivity): the scales fall from your eyes and you’re able to see through things. You may also experience heightened intuition and psychic ability in the contraction phase.

That which has been hidden to you is exposed. This includes what’s inside you: in other words, your shadow side. It’s not always pretty but it’s necessary and, if you can accept and take responsibility for these parts, it can both mature and liberate you.

Menstruation itself is not unlike a ‘deadline’ to the psyche, and there’s nothing like one of those for waking us up to the essential and non-essential in our lives and showing us where we should focus our energy.

(We discover this over and over as we write this book with our publisher’s deadline looming.)

Some women thrive in this second half of the cycle, feeling at their most productive and creative. Alexandra would feel that at last she was on home turf. She’d drop down into a deeper authority, a kind of gutsy power, and knew more clearly what her ‘business’ was and how to direct her energy to get stuff done. She really felt in gear with herself and able to take on goliaths!

For other women it can be more of a challenge and they don't really feel in their groove again until they're back in the first half of the cycle. Your ease with a certain phase will reflect something of your own nature and also the life phase you're in.

'Feeling so inside of life. In a deep groove. Oof, I do sometimes loooove the premenstruum.'

SJANIE, DAY 20

ARMOURING

Generally speaking, in the first half of the cycle, as your energy rises, you experience a growing inner ‘yes’ to yourself – a growing sense of self-confidence that peaks in the ovulatory phase. Your psychological skin toughens up; it’s as though you’ve put on layers of protective armour that allows you to be less sensitive to life’s slings and arrows.

One woman described it beautifully when she shared how she feels at the end of the first half of her cycle:

‘I notice myself inhabiting an entirely different realm of being. It’s as if I have a stronger protective membrane now, compared to days 5, 6, 7, when the world seemed to permeate so easily. How fragile I felt then.

‘Now, I notice a surge of energy. I’m wanting to feel my physicality, and notice an easy engagement with the world. This too shall pass... but for now I’m enjoying this sense of clarity and strength.’

MARIA

While emotionally you may feel more resilient at this time, the shadow side is that you can be less connected to your deep feelings.

Conversely, in the second half of the cycle, as the energy retreats, you begin to shed some of that armouring. Yep, that’s how more ‘feeling’ sneaks through. If your sense of self is already a little tender and see-through before you arrive in the second half of the cycle – and we’ve all had moments of that – then the de-armouring of the contraction phase can feel overwhelming. To the point where you might think you’re ‘losing it’.

This can feel anything but empowering. However, it *is* meaningful. You're being shown something about yourself that needs attention. If you're able to pace yourself and meet this feeling of being overwhelmed with sufficient presence and kindness (and having a friend or a wise counsellor to help you in this can be crucial), you can get to the root of the distress to allow acceptance and healing.

You may also be a highly sensitive person, an intuitive or psychic, and the de-armouring phase could just leave you too stripped bare – if you're not mindful of this aspect of your nature and the dynamic of the cycle.

Whether this feeling of overwhelm and 'losing it' is your shadow side, an old wound, or your sensitive, intuitive nature, the process of working with your cycle and restoring its wisdom can be your means to heal and strengthen your capacity to thrive within the uniqueness of your own nature.

We also recommend the work of Elaine Aron, author of *The Highly Sensitive Person*, for further resources on living well.

Your health challenges revealed

We should also add that the second half of the cycle can reveal vulnerabilities in your overall health. The cycle is stress sensitive, and for that reason it's our 'early warning system'.

Just as you can feel emotionally overwhelmed close to bleeding, so your immune system is more sensitive, and your pain tolerance plummets. So you might want to avoid, for example, having your legs waxed. Women with underlying health vulnerabilities or chronic illnesses may notice a flare-up of these at this time.

Much of what we label PMS is a sign that you're run down.

Improving your self-care through a healthy diet, sufficient rest, appropriate exercise and a reduction in stressors – including environmental pollutants – will go a long way towards easing your symptoms.

It isn't just that your PMS will go away, but your overall health will leap forward. If your self-care practices need some tweaking, or a serious upgrade, head to our online course Hormone Harmony (see [Resources](#) section) for inspiration. You'll get more pleasure from reading this book if you have some of these health practices under your belt.

Once again, we must emphasize that vulnerability is something to cherish. It nourishes our humanness; it stops us from becoming automatons – unable to feel, know ourselves and love.

Vulnerability is the doorway into your soul, the key to finding what truly lights you up. It's the means that allows you to be blessed by beauty, bliss, wonder and

all those glorious feelings that make life worth living.

Brene Brown, who has written and researched on this topic extensively, says it beautifully: ‘Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, accountability and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose, or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.’⁵

The contradictions of vulnerability

It's a curious puzzle that, even as you become more permeable and vulnerable in the second half of the cycle, you can herald in a fierce energy, a wild instinctual authority. You can also be surprisingly detached and dispassionate, with little tolerance for fools or anyone who can't get to the point quickly.

We don't know of a woman who hasn't experienced a version of all this: a 'f*ck it' voice, an outrage – as if your being is insulted and you're going to right that wrong.

This energy brings a rising 'inner sovereignty' (authority), and if that isn't recognized and met by yourself or others, it can feel crazy-making. We're reminded of Linzi, who came to one of our creativity workshops. She had us falling around with laughter when she described her premenstrual aggro. She'd be full of indignation at life's frustrations and injustices, and felt like saying: 'Send me the hit list so I can go sort it all out.'

We're not recommending such mafia-like responses during the second half of the cycle – and Linzi didn't want to *do* what she'd felt. However, her feelings *did* highlight an enormous power that she's not yet fully on side with. Cultivating the simple discipline of menstrual cycle awareness to the subtle and not so subtle changes of energy, focus and feeling is a gesture of respect and kindness to your being that shifts everything onto a new course.

Since the workshop, Linzi has used cycle awareness to transform that 'mafia-like' energy into a powerful authority, allowing her to make big alterations in her life. Today she's a changed woman. She glows with joy and loves every inch of being herself; and her premenstrual 'madness' has eased considerably.

The second half of the cycle makes sure you don't become too hardened and

insensitive. It brings you back to what's essential. It tunes up your senses, brings you up against the unremembered, unmet forces of your being. Hold to this knowledge as you feel the wobble: the intensity of unwelcome feeling that leaves you doubting who you are and everything you do.

Be present, let it wash through you and cleanse the scales from your eyes. You have night vision now – you can see into the dark and it's full of light. Let yourself be worked, rocked, disturbed; and above all, don't waste this power by judging it as 'wrong'.

THE TWO VIAS IN DEPTH

Let's now take a closer look at The Two *Vias*, the currents of energy within the menstrual cycle – expansion and contraction – that offer us two ways of being and doing.

These two forces of creation work everything, and give rise to everything. We call them the Masculine Way (the *via positiva*), which is akin to the expanding energy, and the Feminine Way (the *via negativa*), which is akin to the contracting energy.

Each *via*, or Way, has its own unique means of expressing or using power. And each, of course, has its natural home in the cycle process.

The *via positiva*

The *via positiva* is the impetus of the first half of your cycle. It's the impulse to step forward and assert your will – to take control and shape your conditions. It's a core feeling of agency (*see above*): a sense that you're in charge of your life and can make things happen.

The power of agency dominates at this time, supporting you to initiate, assert, impose and manifest your ideas in concrete ways. It's utilitarian and functional. There's an increasing drive to 'seize the moment', with little regard for timing and the necessity of time. In fact, the power of agency is characterized by urgency.

With the *via positiva* impulse you can be immensely productive and achieve a lot. As you go out into life as a young person, this is the energy you need most.

Each menstrual month, you literally ride the wave of this force as it rises from menstruation to ovulation. It's egoic, purposeful, goal-oriented, left-brain dominant – and it supports you to initiate and realize your ideas.

Oh, how we love the *via positiva*! It helps you to form your identity and establish a life. To say, 'This is me.' It makes explicit or real, the potential within you.

The *via negativa*

The *via negativa* is the impetus of the second half of your cycle. It awakens your ability to come into relationship with life and to co-create. Rather than stepping forward, its impulse is restraint, although this restraint should not be seen as *constraint*; on the contrary, it can unleash a powerful, truth-speaking authority.

Rather than asserting your will or imposing an agenda, you hold back and instead, drop down into something: you invite in depth. Right-brain dominant, you use the skills of courting and ‘fishing’ – it’s like a dance of listening in, allowing, following and testing – to draw out the Unknown.

This is the power of encounter at work. It’s no longer about your needs or ego, but the needs of something greater than you, which is expressed *through* you; it’s not *your* timing but the World’s Timing. Or, simply put, that mysterious force called Timing. You move from imposing your own will to being willing and willed: from ‘my will’ to ‘thy will’. There’s room now for the spontaneous, the synchronous, for the Unknown to speak and be heard.

The *via negativa* opens you to the hidden intelligence or deep wholeness at work in your being: to the meaning of your life here on this planet and your responsibility for it. The *via negativa* restores the poetics of life; it awakens you to the sacredness in all things. This is the emphasis or work of the second half of your cycle.

In summary, then:

- **The *via positiva* is about transcendence** – carrying you into a glorious affirmation of your unique expression in the world

- **The *via negativa* is about immanence, vulnerability and intimacy – calling you into a deep sense of belonging.**

These two Ways, or *vias*, meet and shift gear at the two poles of menstruation and ovulation (*see above*). As places of stability and anchoring within the menstrual cycle, the two poles offer you support to be rooted in your place in the world (ovulation) and rooted in your divinity (menstruation). And the power that's most naturally experienced or amplified in both poles is the power of presence.

The *vias* form two different kinds of worlds, or landscapes, but interestingly, neither can be fully itself without the other. Designed to work in synchrony, like the left and right sides of the brain, each needs the other to complete itself. Each menstrual month you're being tutored in both *vias* and their powers, and how to integrate them into your life. In their rhythm you are divinely held.

HOW THE VIAS SUPPORT YOUR INITIATORY PROCESS

The fundamental pattern of the menstrual cycle – building up and breaking down – is, in a nutshell, the initiatory process in action. The first half of the cycle – the *via positiva* – builds our sense of self, and supports us to go out and claim our place in the world. The second half of the cycle – the *via negativa* –undoes our sense of self. Or rather, it makes us more permeable, which can feel like an ‘undoing’ to the ego.

We need to experience vulnerability to recognize that we’re not invincible. We can’t exist alone, an island unto ourselves; rather, we belong to something larger, whether it’s family, community, this beautiful Earth we live on or a spiritual home. We need the ‘other’. And we’re responsible for the other, for the world.

In essence, each menstrual month, we’re shifting from an egoic worldview, in which the emphasis is on ‘me’, to a sense of our self and the world as one: to a feeling of ‘us’.

We’re evolving our capacity to think and feel for the world’s sake – to hold more complexity, the tension of opposites, diversity of thought and trust. We’re allowing the tension of those forces to reveal something new, a higher order of evolution. And, above all, the feeling that we are held.

The built-in imperative of your menstrual cycle is to facilitate this evolutionary process. But if you only honour the *via positiva* consciousness, you can end up sabotaging this natural process of initiation.

Your deep self will let you know, in no uncertain terms, of this loss. We firmly believe that much of our menstrual and menopausal suffering is ultimately a profound feeling of indignation from our soul that this awesome process of

evolution has gone unrecognized.

The grief and rage that emerges premenstrually, and at menopause, has a direct line back to this loss. Much postnatal suffering is also the result of not being tutored in this initiatory dynamic, so the initiation into motherhood shocks us.

Valuing the *via negativa*

The *via positiva* reigns supreme in our Western culture and it seems we don't have the intuition, inner discipline or time for the *via negativa*. However, it's not an option to avoid one *via* at the expense of the other.

As we said in [Chapter 2](#), in the section on the old story of power, when the Masculine operates alone and untempered, its egoic force can end up destroying. This is because its concern is for the individual rather than the whole.

We see this happening economically and environmentally today. And if we fail to care for the Feminine as a counterbalance, trouble will inevitably occur. Women can witness this monthly when we try to keep that wonderful superwoman energy (the *via positiva*) of ovulation going, going, going. And then we're gone, burnt out with the mother of all PMS.

The world is having its own PMS (the collapsing of systems) moment now too. We thought we could have endless growth and use nature to serve our own ends, without any sense of reciprocity or reverence. Now we're experiencing the backlash.

Equally, if the *via negativa* were to reign supreme, problems would arise. Because we've not personally experienced such a phenomenon, it's hard to imagine how it would show up in the world. We just know that these two organic, holy, vital principles are always seeking expression, and if they aren't recognized and equally valued, they will show up unconsciously as trouble.

What we find amusing is that women have been, and sometimes are still, seen as 'trouble' because of the menstrual cycle. More precisely, what's being referred to here is that 'difficult, challenging, provocative' energy of the premenstruum. We don't go quietly. When a woman asserts herself strongly, it can be dismissed

as ‘that time of the month’.

US president Donald Trump did just that. After coming out of a challenging interview with journalist Megyn Kelly, he remarked that she ‘had blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever’. Fortunately, he got a trouncing for it on social media.

The menstrual cycle is a continuous process of initiation into both *vias* or Ways. When we live in a culture that only valorizes one – the *via positiva* – we’re in trouble.

As we shift gear in the second half of the cycle, and feel that exuberant ‘doing’ energy falter, we judge ourselves for being weak or failing, when in fact we’re now engaging another mode of operating that’s equally powerful but in a different way. Instead of naturally segueing, we stumble, fight against ourselves and then try to force ourselves to be something we’re not.

This weakens and distresses us and creates what gets called PMS, or any menstrual problem for that matter. As we’ve said, when there’s no validation for what you experience, you can end up feeling slightly crazy.

While our goal here is to change the current negative paradigm around the premenstruum, until that happens – or rather to hasten it – you can realize the revolution from within by beginning to value your own experience of it.

The Two *Vias* are at the crux of our relationship with power and our ways of being and creating in the world. They are like the two different arms of power. The old power story overvalues the *via positiva*, but we can begin today to validate the *via negativa*. That’s how the new power story gets written.

Let’s round off this chapter with a menstruality practice.

~ Practice: court The Two Vias ~

Set an intention to ‘pace’ your two *Vias* for two months: here’s how. (See [Chapter 8](#) for a fuller description of ‘pacing’.)

- As part of your MCA practice, notice how the two *Vias* show up in your life, and the points at which you feel the gear shift from one to the other.
- How do you experience the world and your life when you’re in the *via positiva* and how do you experience it when you’re in the *via negativa*? Make notes in your journal.
- Notice which *via* is most comfortable for you – the one in which you feel most yourself.
- Now challenge yourself to embrace the *via* in which you feel least at ease.



Chapter 4

The Inner Seasons

Resting within the arms of the two creating forces of the *via positiva* and *via negativa* are four distinct phases that are not unlike the four seasons of the year. The second map of your menstruality initiatory journey, The Inner Seasons, forms the energetic skeleton that supports you as you get to know your own nature and grow into your Wild Power. The map of The Inner Seasons is the workhorse of your initiatory process.

INTRODUCING THE MAP OF THE INNER SEASONS

Each month you move through an inner winter, spring, summer and autumn and back to winter again. Each phase ushers in a set of very specific psychological challenges. In meeting these challenges you rise to the initiatory task, grow your power and build the inner container to hold your full magnificence.

In this chapter we describe the natural powers, initiatory tasks and challenges of each Inner Season. We then explore the moments of transition from one season to the next – what we call the crossover days – and describe what they can reveal.

Opposite is an illustration of the map of The Inner Seasons overlaid on and supported by the map of The Two Vias.

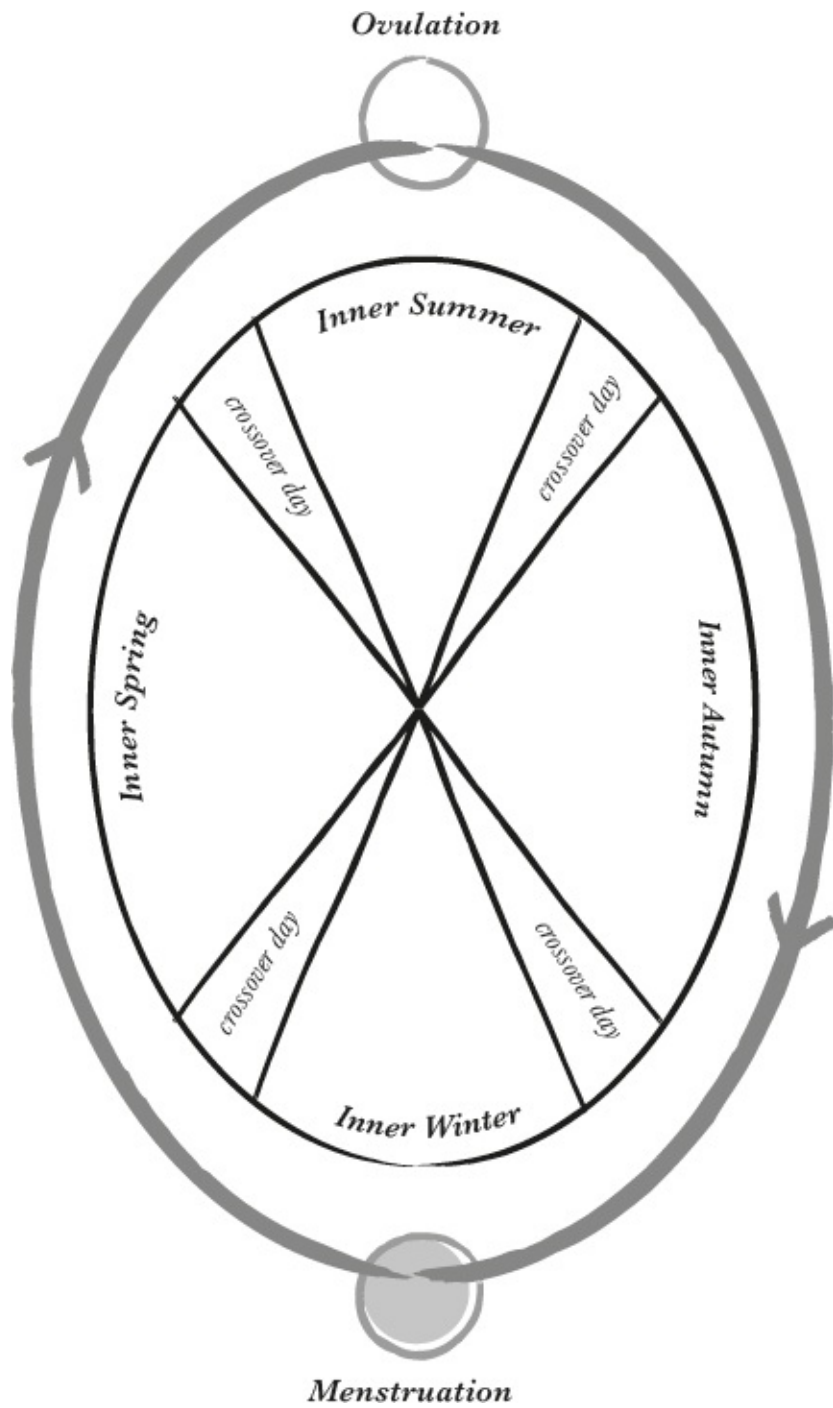
Here's what the map shows:

- The dark nadir of **menstruation** holds both the end and the beginning of your cycle. This is the time of your **inner winter** (*approximately day 27 to day 5*).
- With the **first day of bleeding** you enter a new cycle, and the days that follow gradually herald a time of growth. This is your **inner spring** (*approximately day 6 to day 11*).
- Your **inner summer** (*approximately day 12 to day 19*) is the zenith of your cycle: around **ovulation**, when your energy peaks.

- The **premenstruum** is a time of drawing inwards: this is your **inner autumn** (*approximately day 20 to day 26*).
- Finally, there's a deep letting go into your inner winter, menstruation, once more.

Becoming familiar with the map of The Inner Seasons will support you as you recover the powers of each season (which are described later in this chapter). Note that, while we've given days to The Inner Seasons above, these are rough estimates and will, of course, vary greatly depending on the length of your cycle and various other factors in your life.

It's far more helpful to sense for yourself when you're moving from one season to another, and when you feel firmly in the groove of a particular season. Remember the Big Red Rule (your own experience trumps anything we might say). A big part of The Inner Seasons' charm is their quiet courting of your attention. To put a day on that would really crush their style!



Map of The Inner Seasons

The order of Inner Seasons, and their abiding return each month, create ample opportunity for you to practise the powers of each one, and develop the skills

needed to journey deeper.

Furthermore, you're gifted with the 'crossover' moments: the transitions from one season to another. These offer you another window of opportunity to see your strengths and vulnerabilities clearly, and to gauge how in step you are with the pacing of your cycle.

WHAT ARE THE INNER SEASONS?

The Inner Seasons are your guide to getting to know yourself; they are the template for the creative process (a means for manifesting your Calling) and the necessary preparation for accessing the spiritual powers of menstruation.

Your ally in self-care, stress management and inner work, your Inner Seasons help you to pace your energy, calm your nervous system and get insight and feedback on your overall wellbeing – the building blocks for embodying all aspects of power.

As you learn about yourself through The Inner Seasons, you develop the skills to handle your emotions and make better choices around your behaviour. It's a means of personal therapy and healing that teaches you how to harness the power of your unique nature.

As a template for the creative process, The Inner Seasons reveal the very precise stages every creative project goes through. This is built into your body as a woman – it's your personal creativity coach for accessing inspiration and manifesting your ideas.

Each Inner Season holds a key initiatory step, or stage, that works you month after month through your menstruating years in order to become and claim your full self.

The first *and* last stage happens at **menstruation – your inner winter** – in which you 'die' to the self you think you are or should be, and are restored to the full grandeur of your authentic self: to a greater or lesser degree.

As you emerge from your inner winter into your **inner spring – the**

preovulatory phase – you learn to hold and cherish this undefended, authentic self that you touched at menstruation. Moving from your inner spring to your **inner summer – the time of ovulation** – you step up to declare and share your authentic self.

Then you cross over into the **inner autumn – the premenstruum** –where you withdraw and reflect on the journey so far. It requires you to face and examine yourself, to meet the shadow side and confront your inner critic: that unrelenting inner voice that has nothing good to say. So powerful and important is this figure in our menstruality initiatory journey that we have devoted the whole of [Chapter 6](#) to it – restoring it as a catalyst for claiming more of your authentic self, your Wild Power.

This ‘claiming of yourself’ is important in preparation for the death moment that comes again on the cusp of menstruation. So you can let go, be undone, reworked and injected with the fuel of your deep holy self – and given another chance to go out, hold, test and realize it more in the world.

The three layers of the map of The Inner Seasons

The Inner Seasons can be explored through three different layers:

- **Wellness:** your self-care and inner work.
- **Creativity:** your in-built template to realize your dreams.
- **Spirituality:** your path to Holy Union.

Each layer holds a crucial element of the initiatory process and all three work together, simultaneously, in a deeply integrative way. You can visualize the layers as a set of three bowls, one inside the other. The outermost and largest bowl is the spiritual dimension, the middle one is the creative template, and the inner one is the wellness process.

As you ground yourself in each layer, beginning with Wellness, you lay down the inner psychological awareness and ‘musculature’ to access and grow into the full creative and then spiritual possibilities of the cycle. This gives you powerful healing medicine and a deeply illuminating guide to your psychological and spiritual evolution.

In this book, rather than going into the details of these three layers, we’ll focus on the initiatory process itself, which is like a deep underground river that governs and works us through the three layers of Wellness, Creativity and

Spirituality.

Understanding the seasonal powers and tasks, and the crossover days, is your foundation for beginning to work with these layers – a way to get to know your own nature and cherish it, discover your Calling, manifest it and experience spiritual wholeness and revelation.

Before we dive into the descriptions of The Inner Seasons, we want to remind you again that your own experience trumps everything we say.

‘Each woman’s cycle is so particular to her, it can’t be made “perfect” or sanitized – our expression of it is so individual.

‘I’m very grateful for this knowledge. It holds subtle intimacy and I’m aware of how I’ve grown and changed and come to know myself more deeply because of it.’

HELEN

THE INNER SEASONS IN DEPTH

If the idea of naming The Inner Seasons is new to you, you may find that having this evocative metaphor starts to bring the landscape of your cycle experience into stark relief. As we describe the archetypal natural powers, or ‘textures’, of each season below, it may help you to notice them more acutely in yourself. The natural powers are the innate resources, skills and tendencies that you can tap into in each season.

If you discover that your Inner Seasons lack the archetypal essence we describe below, perhaps something is amiss. Do also remember that this could reflect your nature:

If you’re a via positiva woman, you may find the autumn and winter more of a challenge. If you’re a via negativa woman, the rising energy of the first half of the cycle might feel unsettling.

With attention and willingness, you can synchronize with The Inner Seasons and learn how to cooperate with your changing needs and tendencies. With time, any conflict you have with your cycle will fall away, and you’ll begin to feel held by it, which creates a deepening inner kindness and a tender intimacy towards yourself.

As you read the following descriptions we ask you to indulge in the full potential and possibility of each season of the cycle, and hold this awareness in the background as you pay attention to your unique version of each one. There’s something both universal about your experience and utterly unique and idiosyncratic. Love the idiosyncrasies as you journey forth.

INNER WINTER (MENSTRUATION)

In your inner winter lie the natural powers of:

- Detachment
- Inner connection
- Effortless presence
- Stillness
- Expansive awareness and altered states of consciousness
- Restoration – purification, soothing and healing
- Bliss
- Acceptance
- Forgiveness of self and others

- Receiving love (self-love)
- Intimacy and Union
- Experiencing all life as sacred
- Ecstasy and visioning
- Inner guidance and instruction

*‘Drifting into blissful nonchalance. Holding hands with sweetness.
Blessed by this quiet peace.’*

SJANIE, DAY 1

Everything begins and ends with menstruation: your inner winter. If you surrender to this season and consummate its gifts, you’re perfectly set up for the succession of seasons that follow.

Menstruation is the time to abandon all responsibilities and do nothing. It’s the moment for rest, repair and renewal; it’s the anchor, the magnetic true north that gets you all lined up, filled up, loved up and prepped for the creative art of living.

The inner winter is the natural de-stress time when you surrender all the stuff of the world that you’ve been carrying, have your jangled nerve endings soothed and reconnect to your core. You tank up on physical energy, love and meaning; you receive a vision or monthly download for your life’s direction, and then a little nudge for what to attend to in the coming month.

Menstruation is the engine room of your power – the ultimate antidote to procrastination. It's the prime time to plant the seeds of your intentions for the coming cycle and beyond.

We like to say that how you bleed sets the tone for the whole of your cycle. We think of menstruation as 'the miracle cure'. Many of the challenges that show up throughout the menstrual cycle can be eased or remedied by a deep visitation of your inner winter, allowing yourself to release and deeply rest.

Certainly, at this time in history, the deep visitation of winter is the thing that most of us deeply long for and need, whether we know it or not. Like land that's been over-farmed and monopolized for production, our souls are thirsting – longing to lie fallow and drink in the nourishment of stillness and unhurried languor.

Menstruation is the great interrupter of our *via positiva* world: it brings a halt to busyness. It comes to reset and reorder our being so we can maintain our vitality and wellbeing. Menstruation's role is to undo you, so you can experience some true respite. Then it puts you back together again, freshly minted to go out and conquer the world once more.

It's a wonderful pit stop on what would otherwise be a dizzying, out-of-control, 24/7 rollercoaster of a life. It's as crucial as sleep for your physical body, and equally essential for your mental and emotional wellbeing.

A call to retreat

The arrival of inner winter is signalled a day or two before you bleed. As you get closer to menstruation, you'll feel a natural slowing down; this is a sign that you're changing gear and preparing to cross over into menstruation. There will be a moment that calls you to step down from your mundane life and prepare to drop more deeply into yourself.

As you begin to bleed you may feel an intense need to stop, or at the very least move more slowly. If you can, follow your body as much as possible. Ideally, it's your moment to drop your bundle and walk off into the sunset – abandoning all responsibilities, children, partners, problems, stuff, whatever. Bye-bye, you say, as you slip off the edge of the planet into your own bubble of bliss. We can but dream.

'Doing the menstrual holiday justice.'

SJANIE, DAY 3

Menstruation is your natural retreat time. All women probably yearn for it, and long for the total permission to let go of cares and worries. While we fantasize about it, we do have to say that it's actually a necessity. Even if you only manage to give yourself 1 per cent of what you yearn for, your psyche registers it and is assuaged.

At least until the next time. By then you'll be stronger, more determined – having tested that 1 per cent and had an entire month of tutelage in honing your power and asserting your boundaries to claim what's rightfully yours. Just remember: all human beings need downtime. We lucky women get a monthly built-in reminder to claim it.

Start small and we can almost guarantee that before long you'll be pitching your Red Tent and claiming your full right to menstrual leave. You'll be pinning your personal period policy to the refrigerator – whether that's at home or at work – as you waltz out the door!

Rest is the revolution that's going to power your life, and menstruation is The Ultimate Time for getting it.

A natural 'high'

Menstruation holds an extraordinary secret that's rarely known, acknowledged or given the veneration it deserves. It's the ability to experience altered states of consciousness, *naturally* and *effortlessly*. You can slip into vastly expanded states of awareness and experience blissful, ecstatic and loving states of being and union.

As you enter menstruation it's as if a veil or defensive armouring between you and the spiritual worlds falls away. Your organs of perception are cleansed, so you can see into and fully experience this expanded dimension.

Initially, it can feel as if a carpet has been suddenly removed from under you, leaving no ground on which to stand. And this can be especially so if you're unconscious of it. The outer 'lights' of the world – your link to normal life, your imagined place in the world, your egoic identity – are momentarily cut. In short you 'die', or rather your ego does. This is the peak moment of the initiatory process.

Alone and exposed to vast, ineffable forces in a place where the normal rules of life no longer apply, your navigation system must come now purely from a presence to and deep trust in yourself: to the internal states that you experience, the guiding inner lights of you.

As you do this, you learn to meet the Great Emptiness and feel an extraordinary plenitude, the Great Fullness. Rather than being alone, you potentially come to land in the most divine feeling of belonging. You're Home, held in the tender and gracious arms of the Great Mama.

'I'm discovering a great power within that's most intense during bleeding. I'm not afraid, and I also value the visions and messages that come to me at that time. The connection to nature has become so

strong, it's a "must" in my life.

'I respect myself more. I'm more aware of my needs and less ashamed of asking for what I now know is my right. By asking to fulfil my needs, others seem to respect me more... it's so much easier to allow healing to happen and move on.'

DESI

Menstruation is the wild card, a place of great expansiveness in which your defences are down and you're wide open to everything – the light and the dark, the most exquisitely intimate and the most cosmic. You step off the edge into the Great Unknown to find the Inner Temple of Woman.

Within the embrace of menstruation you come to rest in the essence of your Wild Power and momentarily feel the fulfilment of it. Gradually, you emerge from menstruation with a fresh – and we hope – more evolved iteration of you: to be expressed, shaped and tested in the world once more.

This plethora of gifts can be unwrapped by following the clues your body gives you throughout the whole cycle, and in particular through the exquisite energetic shifts of menstruation itself.

Because the time of menstruation is so extraordinary, we've dedicated [Chapter 5](#) to unfolding its inner spiritual process – the clues that lead you to this holy space and the challenges you might encounter on the way, all held in the map of The Five Chambers of Menstruation.

Inner winter – initiatory tasks

Your initiatory tasks are to:

- Claim space for yourself
- Let go and rest
- Nurture yourself

Your first task is to know when menstruation is roughly due and mark yourself in your diary as ‘unavailable’. Plan for empty space and reduce what you have to do as much as possible, within the realities of your life.

Do your ‘big shop’ before your period is due; get the fridge stocked, a few meals prepared and your family and friends on side. ‘Raise the red flag’ to call in your allies and get all hands on deck. Remember, you can offer the same practical help to your friends when they menstruate.

This is the ultimate moment to say ‘no’ to the world and ‘yes’ to yourself, so that you can do remarkably little. Value the power of doing nothing and just let yourself be. Rest, rest, and rest a little more.

If you can’t do that, at least choose to move at the pace of your body, and don’t

let yourself get harried by the pace of the world. Ignore the ringing phone, turn off all electronic devices and lock the front door (or, possibly, if you're fending off toddlers, the toilet door – a tip from Sjanie's book of tricks).

Create a sanctuary for yourself that keeps the harsh realities of the world at bay. Burn your list of things to do, give up your agenda, cocoon yourself from demands – both inner and outer – and allow yourself to gently potter, drift and saunter around without an apparent care in the world. Even if it's just for an hour.

“Slow way down... while no answers may be coming, for now – dare to see that nothing is urgent. Rest in the vastness of the question.”

‘I'm loving these resonant words from Matt Licata.’

SJANIE, DAY 3

Finally, comes possibly the hardest task of all: indulging yourself in pleasure, good old-fashioned pleasure:

- Sit in an armchair and stare out the window.
- Lie on the grass and watch the clouds.
- Luxuriate in a hot bubble bath, or oil your skin from head to toe with aromatic elixirs and royal concoctions.
- Do anything that really indulges your senses and pleasures your body.

Even if it's only for half an hour, just give yourself some or all of this. Actually, your one and only sacred task of winter is to utterly give in and receive.

Inner winter – initiatory challenges

To rest and do nothing is a massive challenge in a culture that doesn't value it. Productivity and busyness is king and doing little is synonymous with being lazy, weak and unproductive.

However, there's no substitute for rest – all human beings need it and menstruation is a natural moment for it. If you don't rest, you rapidly become unmotivated, exhausted and possibly ill.

Your body's ability to de-stress depends on downtime, and downtime at menstruation is one of the most effective and efficient ways to soothe and repair your nervous system.

'The call to rest and do nothing has come. And of course it's being met by inner protests to just do this or that and must check this and that. The inevitable restlessness that follows in the wake of a stream of days of doing, doing, doing.'

'I'm just letting the urge have its last hoorah, and trusting that menstruation will deliver me home to stillness.'

SJANIE, DAY 2

Much of what we women feel as stress is also directly connected to not being able to honour and work with the organic menstrual cycle rhythm – in particular, the rest and repair of menstruation. Time and again women have shared with us how menstrual cycle awareness (MCA) has liberated them from chronic stress and other health challenges, and made them more effective and productive to boot.

Roshni has been transformed by this simple awareness: ‘I never knew how my productivity changed with my cycle, until about six months ago,’ she says. ‘And when I did, it was a revelation. It helped me know exactly when to “do” and exactly when to “rest”. This made me so much more efficient overall – it changed my life.’

Menstrual pain

One obstacle to receiving the gifts and blessings of menstruation is pain. But we encourage you to bear with the idea that if you could just stop and feel utterly present to what you experience, you may find that not only does the pain ease but your presence to the pain also makes it more bearable.

Alexandra can speak from experience here. You may also get huge insight about the pain and what you need, as she did. If you don’t stop at menstruation, and instead pop a few pills, you could numb out and disconnect from a huge potential power source.

One woman had come to a couple of our workshops, but still struggled with excruciating menstrual pain. Until one day she decided to follow our suggestion to do nothing; here’s what happened:

‘I’ve never really understood why I suffer. Well, I feel, after 20 years or so, I may have come closer to understanding. Last month on day 2, my most painful day, I decided to lie down for the first time and wriggle around during the pain, rather than knock back some ibuprofen.

‘I thought, “Fine, blood, speak to me then.” As I lay there and listened, I felt a huge amount of love completely enter me. It was like what you’d said about being “washed with a wave of love”. I felt it. I couldn’t believe it. And then I heard the pain say, “I’ve been so painful because you’ve not been letting the love in.” (I’m welling up as I write this).

‘She has been trying to reach me, speak to me, fill me with love all

along, and the only reason it's been painful is because I've been blocking her love. At first I couldn't believe it was so simple, so I "tested" her. "Bollocks," I said to myself, and in that instant...pain. When I thought, "Allow the love to enter me," there was no pain. I kept doing that a few times until I really got the message. It was just incredible.'

ANJA

The stress-reduction practice of menstruation is already built into your body and costs nothing. But this natural de-stressor is at odds with our *via positiva*, 'go, go, go' world and the demands of the average workplace – all of which actively encourage us to ignore natural rhythms and use will to overcome nature.

But nature – our bodies in this instance – always has the last laugh. Only our bodies aren't laughing, they're crying out with illness and exhaustion.

When menstruation is ignored, not only do you slowly erode your vitality, you lose the ground to your life. It's as if the anchor that roots you into who you are comes adrift.

You can easily feel overwhelmed by the demands and imperatives of others. You can lose your connection to what matters to you and may find yourself living out other people's agendas.

One of the challenges of menstruation is to feel the previous month's achievements behind you – the sense that you've used your energy to good effect. If you don't feel that sense of fulfilment, it's harder to let go and you might feel restless, distracted and empty.

If you don't stop at menstruation, not only do you miss your anchorage, you also skip the important inner task of taking stock, reflection, remembering, and resetting your compass, your true north.

At menstruation your boundaries are more permeable. It's this that allows you to enter into spiritual consciousness, but if you aren't able to retreat and protect yourself from the pressures of mundane life, you can easily end up feeling overwhelmed, irritable and invaded.

Some of the dark feelings associated with menstruation – such as high anxiety, panic attacks, depression, anger, suicidal thoughts, feeling as if you're going crazy, acting out and a flare-up of addictions – may be a direct result of not being able to retreat when you need to.

Practice: make time for menstruation

- Mark menstruation in your diary.
- Find some small way to make this time special for you. For example, light a candle to yourself or buy some flowers. or perhaps you have a special piece of jewellery or item of clothing you could wear.
- Carve out some time to rest and do nothing.
- Whatever your day holds, find a way to move slowly.

INNER SPRING (PRE-OVULATION)

In your inner spring lie the natural powers of:

- Tenderness
- Innocence
- Containment
- Curiosity
- Playfulness
- Imagination and possibility
- Surging energy/life
- Desire – sexual and emotional
- Focus

- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Foolhardiness
- Positivity
- Assertiveness

‘A surge: it feels as if something is bursting forth, everything is heightened with a charge. I feel like I’m breaking through something.’

SJANIE, DAY 9

After rest at menstruation, you arrive in your inner spring cleansed, sanctified and set free to start afresh. Resurfacing in the world innocent and pure, a clean slate. Everything is possible once again: the old skin has been shed; you’re born anew and free to re-choose your life. You emerge feeling footloose and fancy-free, cloaked in the love and affirmation you received at menstruation.

While it’s great to be inspired and motivated by others, it’s sublime to discover that you have a natural motivator within. This is one of the great gifts of the preovulatory time. All your deepest desires and longings are rolled out from the winter into the spring, laced in natural motivation.

There’s a rise in desire and an increasing appetite to make real the ideas and visions you receive at menstruation. It’s as if those visions come with their own built-in jetpack and enough fuel to land them in the world.

During the inner spring you can feel acutely the simple and profound way that

menstruation has supported you to sustain your commitment to your Calling and the truth of who you are. Without the pause, reset and refresh you would feel dry as a stone and quickly lose the pleasure and lustre needed to fuel your vision and potential.

The inner spring is a time of 'build-up' and growing anticipation. You may feel your sexual energy wake up, and suddenly notice just how attractive so-and-so looks. You may start to feel more attractive yourself, especially towards the end of spring.

It's as if you wake up to yourself as a woman, and with that your instinct to connect with others is turned on.

Your 'give a sh*t' (aka your capacity to care) returns, after abandoning you in late autumn, and your care for other people's needs starts to grow.

You may suddenly notice the practical detail of your life, as well as find yourself planning and plotting grand schemes. You're blessed with an effortless focus that will help you contain and hold your emerging ideas, and your new tender sense of self, until the time is right for both to be revealed. It can feel wonderful as life opens up and your energy increases, an effervescent joy and laughter at your fingertips.

It's a time when you could easily be amused by silliness and indulge in the lightness of being. Momentarily, you can recapture the same freedom and unburdened ease that young children feel – the immediacy that allows them to be unhurried and deeply absorbed in the unfolding opportunities for play, experimentation and wandering.

*'Oh so willing to put up with people's sh*t today.'*

SJANIE, DAY 11

During the preovulatory time, you've got the scope to try, test out, feel into and play with who you are and what you're doing. It can be a liberating time: full of agility, flexibility and light-heartedness. You get to try on different hats, experiment with various styles and approaches, act 'as if', and discover much through the world of your imagination.

Inner spring – initiatory tasks

Your initiatory tasks are to:

- Contain
- Cherish
- Experiment and play
- Take a risk

The initiatory tasks develop as you move through spring. The first task is to move tenderly as you emerge from winter, and not let your wilful power of agency take over too soon. You have to remember you're like a newly hatched chick – your undefended, uncompromised self – that needs time to find its footing back in the bright lights of the world. You need to cherish this tender self so that it might have more purchase and place in your everyday life.

Secondly, allow yourself to really feel the rising new life – without impulsively acting on it all at once, lest it blow your fuses. The task is to contain this rising charge enough that you feel stable in it, allowing yourself to experiment and play without getting swept away. To bring enough safety and containment while still letting yourself grow.

The inner spring asks you to keep open and curious. The spirit of play is held in high regard now, and you're invited to let yourself soften into this youthfulness without a care for outcome or consequence. Abandon the weight of responsibility, experiment and try stuff out just for the heck of it.

'Rev the engine. Honk the horn. Toot toot, puff puff, off we go!'

SJANIE, DAY 9

Finally, dare to risk. Let yourself be foolhardy, take a chance, and pay no heed to the voice of reason; this need go no further than the safe confines of your imagination. It's the 'let's chuck the paint on the canvas and see how it lands' kind of energy. Allow yourself this abandon and freedom so innocence can be preserved. Avoid too much heavy-duty, forceful 'doing', and instead 'do lightly' in a way that doesn't harden you up.

Inner spring – initiatory challenges

The inner spring is dynamic, moving you from the stability of menstruation to the fulfilment of ovulation – from a place of great privacy to a place of effortless exposure, on a rising wave of energy. Rather than letting go, as you do in summer or winter, your challenge is to ‘hold the tension’ and not splurge all this energy at once.

‘There’s such a charge going through my body today, I can’t sit still. It’s coursing through me and I fear I may just take off like a hot air balloon or spontaneously combust.’

SJANIE, DAY 10.

The move from menstruation into spring is potentially ‘dangerous’ because you’re vulnerable. Remember that newly hatched chick? If you can negotiate this well, you’re pretty much home and dry with this season.

The challenge is to learn how to hold and pace that vulnerability in a culture that’s so driven. To midwife your tender self back into the world graciously, awareness of your cycle is everything. This attention brings a containing safety and the presence of love.

No doubt you’ll have a pile of stuff awaiting your return from menstrual retreat – a full inbox, an overflowing laundry basket, an empty fridge or needy children, to name but a few. Tempting as it may be to quickly get things back on track and step on the accelerator, you’re likely to overshoot. If you suddenly shift that deep inner focus onto everything around you, you may feel a jolt or a shock to your now sensitive system.

That sweet intimacy you encountered in winter could be squashed into oblivion,

becoming easily overwhelmed – your energy could be scattered and your nervous system primed for burnout. When this happens it's a sign you've lost connection with yourself, leaving you disoriented.

It could be bad news if you enter the wonderful summer energy of the cycle feeling this way, as you'll probably end up doing everything for everyone else and not fulfil what you really want.

You may be full of ideas now but your challenge is to keep your cards close to your chest. This is not the moment to reveal all to the world. Your ideas need to be safe, guarded from critical analysis and negativity to allow them time to grow and strengthen within you. If you have a rampant inner critic, your challenge, in particular, is to ring-fence this season from it, lest your new tender shoots get trampled by its harshness.

The challenge is to allow yourself to be an innocent beginner again in a hypercritical culture that seems to demand perfection and instantaneous expertise.

It's tough to risk being foolish and trust incompetence as a necessary step on the path to competence. To demand anything of yourself – to put pressure on yourself for an outcome, or try to 'get somewhere' – could block your ability to play and be curious. Aiming for results and outcome is premature and shuts down all the potential and possibility of this spring phase.

Denise has found in her professional work with trauma that someone with a history of childhood abuse or neglect, in whatever form, may find that the rising energy of the inner spring triggers intense fear.

Having had to constrict or desensitize early in life as a survival strategy, they may have difficulty allowing rising energy in their system without shutting it down. They may also not have the capacity to channel the energy outwards into action, so it can spin inside and create havoc.

Practice: pace the surge of your inner spring

- Give yourself permission to emerge slowly from menstruation.
- Allow time to dream impossible dreams without reason getting in the way.
- Make spontaneity and play part of your modus operandi.

INNER SUMMER (OVULATION)

In your inner summer lie the natural powers of:

- Outward focus
- Loving others
- Visibility
- Optimism
- Taking charge
- Mastery
- High energy
- Charm
- Magnetism and attraction

- Generosity
- Diplomacy
- Being in the flow
- Allowing
- Gratitude
- Pleasure

Oh, the summer! A time of plenitude and ease. You have arrived. Your energy is at an all-time high, giving you the capacity to ‘have it all’.

‘Cruising nicely into summer with a smile on my face. Ready to smash some work!’

FREYA-ROSE, DAY 11

There really are no limits now: you can be all things to all people. ‘Superwoman’ lives, and you get to *be* her – for about 10 days, that is. While it lasts you can be a powerhouse of productivity, multi-tasking and fun. *And* it’s a time of languid ease and deep embodied presence to the world of sensual delights.

Inner summer offers a great opportunity to sink your teeth into work and creative projects and get results. Working now, especially if it’s work you love, can feel fantastic.

You can get into ‘the zone’ with whatever you’re doing and easily find your flow. You may experience a sense of mastery as all your skills and competencies come together. Your critical, judgemental mind generally gets out of the way, allowing creativity and self-expression to pour out of you, unedited and unchecked.

You care less about what others think – if anything, you’re more likely to imagine everyone is on your side right now. At this time, it’s not too hard to believe that life loves you and is conspiring to help you.

Your magnetism is at an all-time high, and synchronicities and fortuitous events pop up, drawing what you desire towards you. Whatever you hold in your heart is likely to be magnified in the world around you and in the people you meet.

Life’s mirror may reflect back kindness, generosity and support. The world is showing you your own beauty and love – this is a treasured gift to drink in.

It can be marvellous to be deep in the flow of your ovulatory time, and feel the giddy high of knowing that everything is possible. The whole world is at your feet and you can feel a natural confidence and comfort just being inside your own skin.

Trusting life comes easily and you may feel the road rise up to meet your every step. If you’re true to yourself and following your Calling, this season can be like a groovy jive dance with life, as you get busy with manifesting your dreams.

‘Aaaaah, at last. It’s like my whole spine has lengthened and I’m remembering the true majesty of who I am...a Woman. Feeling a powerful need to be seen and met in my fullness.’

AMBER, DAY 14

Express yourself

In the menstruality initiatory journey, this season serves to affirm you and what you're here to give. It's an opportunity to give *of* yourself: to share your gifts and to be seen and appreciated by others.

This season honours the woman you've become and urges you to celebrate your talents and beauty. If you have projects or ideas you've been working on, you can draw on a natural confidence now to share your efforts and let the fruits of your labour be tasted and enjoyed by others.

The summer can be a very grounded time – if you're in connection with yourself and your cycle. Your body opens to pleasure and sensual delights may captivate you. You may feel drawn to be more affectionate and tactile, and are likely to experience greater pleasure from touch and close physical contact with others. Things can feel so darn good.

You feel attractive and, like a honey pot to a bee, you're a source of great attraction and interest. Chances are that people will turn their heads as you go by, because you've got that extra bit of sass in your step.

At this time of heightened sexual energy, some women feel really turned on and aroused. The sensations of rising sexual energy can be quite strong and sublime – its as though you're being charged up by this creative force.

'Everything is sexual. Eating, walking, getting dressed... wondering how to work with such strong energy.'

SAM, DAY 15

This is the season for mothering. As a mother you can easily hold your children and your family's best interests at heart, think about their needs and desires, and give generously to them.

If you could be here all month long, mothering would pose far less of a challenge, but you would be in danger of completely losing yourself. Thank goodness the season does turn as we get to be more than just a mother – sustaining, nurturing and revealing other parts of ourselves.

Your mind is more logical, neat and tidy now; things are simple and straightforward. You tend to see the best in everything and everyone. Nothing is too much trouble, and it can feel right and satisfying to say 'yes' to whatever comes your way.

Inner summer is the time when you can easily say 'yes' to yourself, too. 'Yes' to what it is you want to create, grow and offer. It's this commitment to yourself and your true desires that ensures you don't give out all the positive, vibrant energy to others but instead offer some to yourself.

During your inner summer your heart can burst open as you're filled with gratitude and appreciation for others and for life itself. There's a possibility now for very simply loving yourself in an uncomplicated kind of way.

And because you feel so wholehearted and harmonious, it's the perfect time to capitalize on self-praise and a few hearty pats on your own back. The more generous you can be with yourself, the more resilient you'll feel when your inner autumn comes calling.

'Expanding some more. Fully occupying my own personal space. Inhabiting my circle and feeling beautifully inoculated against the world's ills.'

SJANIE, DAY 14

Inner summer – initiatory tasks

Your initiatory tasks are to:

- Take your foot off the brake
- Declare yourself
- Drive forward your projects
- Take pleasure and enjoy

As you enter the summer your main tasks are to say ‘yes’ to yourself and commit to what you want to put your energy into. This allows you to truly get behind your ideas, plans and goals and let go into the flow of this season.

You’re being asked to step up, enter the spotlight, peek your head above the parapet and let yourself be seen. It’s not a time to shrink away or blend into the crowd – your uniqueness is being called forth.

Dance to the beat of your own drum, without getting distracted by what others are doing and falling into the comparison game.

Don't let the natural outer focus of this season run wild. Keep track of your own desires and let them be fulfilled. Use this high energy to drive forward with your projects, get the big bits of housework done, and stoke your social life.

If you're a mother, fill up your family's tank – plan special time with your children; enjoy family games or outings; organize nights out or in with your partner.

Get on with making stuff happen and enjoy being a multi-tasker extraordinaire. Make contact with friends, catch up and enjoy long, lazy conversations. Let go, let your hair down and enjoy yourself, whatever that looks like for you. Take time to consciously celebrate yourself and what's working in your life, and give thanks.

'Dear people, human beings, everyone. Come and join me. I just want to chat, chat, chat, chat, chatter.'

SJANIE, DAY 13

Inner summer – initiatory challenges

Your summer tasks may at first seem simple or easy – especially if you enjoy the energy of the ovulatory time – in part because this is the season that we women are most loved and affirmed for.

We generally toe the party line and give generously to others without much controversy or challenge. In spite of this, the summer can be a deep challenge as it's asking you to show up as your unique self.

Given how deeply we all long to be loved and accepted, it's no surprise that our instincts drive us to do whatever it takes to fit in and not stand apart. But to fulfil your power, you cannot remain as one of the group, be a part of the status quo and fit in. Your challenge is to really show yourself unashamedly.

Life can feel full of hope and promise and you may feel it will last forever. Summer can be a very transcendent and quite intoxicating energy and it's easy to become ungrounded and lose your connection to yourself.

“High as a kite” is a great simile for ovulation – if I’m not careful I can get that “too many coffees” feeling. There’s a way to lie back and enjoy the waves, rather than try to make them.’

ADELE, DAY 15

The sheer comfort and pleasure of this time can keep you blinkered from the difficult, awkward stuff of life. Because you feel so fabulous, ebullient and invincible you may become insensitive and blasé about others' feelings. You're also at this time naturally tougher and less in touch with your own feelings and needs.

Because of this, you can slip out of the groove of your own truth and into the armouring of a socialized self – presenting an ‘approved’, glossy version – and shuffle much of who you are under the carpet. Showing only what you imagine is good about yourself is one of the biggest blocks to intimacy, and a potential breeding ground for shame.

Your eccentricities and idiosyncratic ways fuel your Wild Power. If you keep these parts of yourself shut off behind a social mask, you’ll be out of touch with the power that’s utterly unique to you.

Such a fine line exists between the freedom to feel this abundant joy and the slippery slope of excess, hedonism and overindulgence. Who hasn’t at one time or another got so swept up in a good thing, that it turned bad? Oh, the reckless road of pleasure...

‘So here’s the question: how not to catch a speed wobble, become top heavy and totally wipe out? This is such a heady season in the cycle.’

SJANIE, DAY 15

The inner summer is the time to get stuff done and make things real. That’s all fine and dandy if you know what the heck you want to be doing. But what if you feel this charge and don’t know where to direct it?

Chances are you’ll land up losing yourself in others’ agendas and come to the end of summer feeling bereft and empty. The inner summer can be a painful time if you’re lacking a sense of direction, purpose and meaning.

As much as this season invites you to be an individual and stand out, because you feel so good-natured and easygoing you’re naturally primed for service. You tend to think for the group and what’s best for the community, and may leave yourself out completely. It can be tricky to include your own needs when your attention is preoccupied with those of other people.

Handling your sexual power

The inner summer is the time to strut your stuff, flirt and let your sexuality show. Conscious or not, for many women this feels dangerous and possibly even 'dirty'. It's no surprise when you think about how objectified women are in the media, and how the sex industry defaces the sacred and holy nature of sex.

So much distorted power is played out through sexual abuse, making your sexuality a very vulnerable power to show. If this is true for you, you may notice a retraction, fear, ungroundedness, or shutting down as you enter your summer, as the culmination of your sexual energy is blocked and unable to flower.

The inner summer can be seductive. We can easily forget that it's only good because it's temporary. If this high-speed pace were permanent it would lead to exhaustion and burnout. Getting caught up in the high of summer, you may not recognize when the season is coming to a close and end up overshooting – a bit like that cartoon character who rushes off a cliff and continues to run, not realizing that the edge has arrived.

Don't leave the summer woman in charge of your diary – she's so full of energy and generosity that she'll over commit and overbook your time for the rest of the cycle.

You'll end up tired just looking at it, never mind meeting all those commitments. Remember, summer is superwoman territory, and we reckon you have a maximum of 10 days of that and then you have to say 'adios till next time'.

Depending on your nature you could find you put all of your energy into work, or look after others and miss out on the pleasure, fun and social side of this season. At menstruation you're filled up by the spiritual forces and at ovulation you're plugged into the world of pleasure, and both are necessary.

It's not that you must party to fulfil summer – you may fulfil it through a quiet

conversation with a close friend, for example. Pleasure may look one way for us and another for you. Celebrate *your* version of pleasure.

‘I’ve coined the phrase “Ovulatory Panic” or perhaps “Ovulatory Paralysis”. It refers to a sensation I realize I’ve been experiencing all my menstruating life – a thrilling or suffocating pressure, or a pushing upwards from my diaphragm to my throat that occurs at the apex of ovulation.

‘It seems to accompany the knowledge that Everything Is Possible, yet at the same time is restricted by the frustrating limitations of personality, genetics, conditioning and karma.

‘It’s a feeling akin to having my foot on the brake and the accelerator simultaneously. It’s exciting (what if the brake slips?) but also frightening (what if the brake slips?), which is where the panic comes in. I’m now 45 and looking menopause straight in the eye, but I can’t help but wonder how I might have used or negotiated this force if I’d understood what it was 20 years ago.’

PENNY

Practice: ride the flow of your inner summer

- Deliberately pause as you enter the summer and ask yourself what you want to use this energy for – commit to it.
- Take the brakes off and go for it.
- Enjoy an activity that will indulge all your senses and fill you with pleasure.

INNER AUTUMN (PREMENSTRUUM)

In your inner autumn lie the natural powers of:

- Insight
- Saying 'no'
- The critic
- Editing
- Holding the tension
- Catalytic provocation
- Truth-speaking
- Completion
- Channelling

- Losing it
- Drifting
- Abandoning all responsibility
- Discernment

For many, this season of the cycle is the most misunderstood and mismanaged. It has had a bad rap. In part, that's because its powers aren't valued – you channel some fierce, kick-ass, provocative energies. The premenstruum is 'big school' and the forces awakened now demand your attention if they are to be wielded in a creative, healthy way. It's worth noting once again that challenging though it can be, some women really thrive in this phase because it suits their nature.

'Almost enjoying the sharp edges of autumn, there's an air of clarity about it that I haven't appreciated before and that has increased since the more collapsed earlier days of autumn.'

'I'm also enjoying looking back to springtime and getting a sense of what I've been working with this cycle. On the not so easy side, I've had cramps all autumn and have felt very tired. I think it's my womb speaking with a loud raaaaaahhh, listen to me!'

JANNA, DAY 24

You receive a strong call to come back to yourself as this phase asks, 'How are you *really*?' Consciously meeting this question awakens your power to be more fully present to yourself and the internal rupturings, as you elbow away the distractions, demands and noise of the outside world.

Your shadow side

Your shadow side is starting to awaken. The things you've neglected in yourself, the needs you've sidelined, the feelings you've consistently overridden, the historical woundings and intergenerational ancestral patterns that have been relegated to the subconscious, can all break the surface as they seek conscious recognition and integration.

We have the power now to hold the tension of all we feel within and allow it to be. It's as if you're asked to be present to the 'little girl' inside you who may not have had her needs met, or had someone show up for her when she was in distress. Your premenstrual reactivity, rage and self-rejection could just have a direct line back to her.

Instead of reacting to every thought and feeling that floods you at this time, you now have the capacity to 'sit in the stew' and let yourself be cooked.

This presence and 'self-holding' is a direct act of love that transforms these reactive and defensive ways into vital elements of your being and becomes the means for you to soften and expand into your Wild Power. We realize this can be a tall order, but any kind of embodiment practices and healing tools can help.

Some of our personal favourites are Movement Medicine, yoga, Emotional Freedom Technique, somatic experiencing, drawing, journalling, listening partnerships, and a strategy we've developed called the Menstrual Medicine Circle (you can access this through one-to-one sessions with a Red School Mentor, see www.redschool.net/mentors).

The premenstruum is an illuminating time: it shines a light on what's really important to you and where you've fallen short. Even if there's much good in what you're doing, inevitably there are things you haven't managed and stuff

that isn't working that you need to attend to or let go of.

Fortunately though, you have the power to discern what's in and what's out. The scales have fallen from your eyes and things are clear-cut. If you've been struggling to make a decision about something, you can bring it to your inner autumn with the assurance that you'll clearly know which way to go with it.

'I'm on my second cycle with this new knowledge. Since I had a life-changing session with Sjanie and was educated in who, what and where I am, I'm honouring this time.'

'What used to be a "lying down, hopeless, crazy, self-harm of torture" week is now simply a "I want to be by myself" week. Retreat time.'

LINZI, DAY 25

Face yourself

It's time to face the music. It's time to face yourself and move through obstacles you're stalling on. Procrastination isn't an option – you're knee-deep in what needs your attention and the only way out is through. Along with discernment, you have the power of tenacity and a compelling drive to break through to the other side.

Your deep self knows that menstruation awaits you with open arms, offering affirmation, comfort, soothing, renewal and a sense that everything is right again. Repeated tasting of this cyclical round, month after month, can help you build trust in the challenging call of your inner autumn. Even if it can sometimes feel dangerous and scary.

It's true, this phase can be tough for sensitive egos. And whose isn't ultimately? It's here that you come face to face with your inner critic and are confronted with her less than charming barrage of insults. But fear not, what seems like a massive obstacle to be overcome is in fact your greatest ally on your initiatory journey.

In many ways the inner critic epitomizes the power of the premenstruum, inasmuch as it shows us there's always more than meets the eye. Your inner critic is such a huge source of power, and simultaneously a source of challenge, that we've dedicated the whole of [Chapter 6](#) to unravelling it.

You really get to know yourself in this season; you learn where your edges are and the lines you truly need to draw. It's a brilliant time to dish out 'nos' and mark your territory.

The power of 'no' is gold and it's readily available now. Use it to edit, clean up and refine things – prune your life so you can come back in the next round with more growth, definition and vigour.

Women often notice a compulsion to clean, tidy and organize stuff at this time. It's as if we're taking stock and preparing for retreat. This demand for order, clarity and completeness can also serve you to bring things to a close and to end stuff, including unsatisfactory relationships.

'I've got such a drive to get stuff done. My tolerance for unfinished business = zero!'

SJANIE, DAY 21

This is the season in which you'll tackle those icky jobs that have been lurking in the back of your mind, or at the tail end of the to-do list. You're likely to metaphorically (and literally) clean out your fridge and finally get rid of that jar containing one lone pickle. It's time to cross your t's and dot your i's and add a full stop.

During your inner autumn your senses are heightened and you feel increasingly sensitive to what's going on around and inside you. Have you ever noticed how much noisier your environment seems at this time, or how pungent stuff smells? It's as though the anaesthesia that buffered you during your summer wears off to reveal a fuller picture of what's going on.

You feel more permeable as your psychological boundaries fall away, and you may notice a fiercer need to strengthen your outer boundaries with the world. Indeed, they must be strengthened if you are to forge through this time and capitalize on your premenstrual powers.

Your animal nature is enlivened and your instincts are sharper: you have heightened intuition and just 'know' stuff. As an Italian woman said at one of our workshops: 'I know without knowing why I know.' This is the gift of 'sight' that can both illuminate and unsettle as we detect bullsh*t and see through the facade.

What previously seemed perfectly acceptable may now appear riddled with problems, but we do have greater acuity at this time to dig into these and unearth their roots. It can feel so satisfying to get to the heart of something, but equally abrasive if it strips you bare of your protective sheath.

You're the truth-speaker now and what you have to say probably isn't going to go down well. Your tolerance is at an all-time low and you're going to call it as it is. Who was ever loved for pointing out flaws, lies and hypocrisies? However, this energy is your ally in discerning what's in and out, both within and without.

You're rooted in your authority and aligned with your truth – a straight-shooting arrow. And if it's your intention, you'll hit bull's eye every time. You've got the power now to catalyse deep change, both in yourself and in the world around you. And it's a power to behold if you use it wisely.

'Grrr.'

SJANIE, DAY 23

Truth-speaking

Adele was feeling proud of herself because she'd reached day 25 of her cycle managing a lot of extra pressure that had landed on her in her new job as a secondary school teacher. She was really appreciating her cycle awareness practice, which kept her mindful of her inner dynamic and needs. And then Truth Lady turned up in all her glory to challenge her on the fruit of what she was putting herself through in her job.

Adele had received some feedback on her teaching. 'You're great at creating relationships with the students,' she was told. 'They're progressing and they want to learn. However, they don't know their end of year 11 target (which is in 3 years' time), and they don't know the assessment objectives.'

Adele's soulful spirit couldn't contain itself any longer. 'Aaaggghhhh', she cried to herself, 'I just feel like I'm in the wrong place. No, the students don't know those things because Miss doesn't give a monkey's. She cares about them as people rather than as data!'

Adele's premenstruum had just delivered a message in clear, unequivocal terms about her own nature and what's most important to her.

'Really. Anybody need an honest, uncensored piece of my mind? Or do you want to say or do something and are too chicken to do it? I'm your gal. I'm the warrior of truth.'

'Loving it, really. But gaaaaaad, I need to bleed.'

LINZI, DAY 29

As you work consciously with premenstrual power you become a natural at

holding complexity and seeing both sides of a situation. This allows for new ideas to generate and more evolved perspectives to take shape. But be warned, you can flip from one strongly held position to another if you don't recognize that a 'troublemaker' energy is alive in you.

Smartly used, this energy can be channelled as a crusader for good to make Holy Trouble – the kind that unsettles the status quo, shakes things up and keeps people awake. Again, this is an energy you probably aren't going to be loved for, but it's crucial if you're to be in service to the sacred.

Sjanie remembers how this troublemaker energy rose up in her during a dance ceremony. It's hardly a subtle force and on this occasion it announced itself to her quite fiercely. She suddenly had a clear vision of the menstrual cycle as front and centre in Western culture.

Before she could stop and think, she heard herself shout out a rallying cry, in what was a very gentle space: 'Let's make trouble.' Now *that's* the kind of Holy Trouble we certainly can be in service of.

'A fierce and fiery "fly off the handle" kind of day. It's like I'm possessed by indignation and self-righteousness. There just aren't enough four-letter words to get it all out with. Argh!'

SJANIE, DAY 23

Heightened intuition

Many women find they're very creative at this time. You can be a pure channel, calling down inspiration, insight and knowing that seeks to be born into the world. You can be a midwife for the unspoken and unmanifest.

The power here is one of deep embodiment, using the aliveness of your own presence to sense and feel what's beyond everyday awareness; to be a tuning fork for the subtle forces that shape the material world and to 'see' the energetic precursors and past patterning that underpin everything.

These shamanic powers, often feared and misunderstood, can put you in contact with the spirit of elemental life and the healing force of the natural world. It does also mean that you're likely to feel the world more deeply and be more sensitive to the forces of destruction and despair – an often-overlooked gift that keeps you in touch with the realities of life.

The premenstruum is Edveeje's creativity hotspot and she uses it very deliberately. She feels the change in mood and energy and has always greeted it as her 'truth-telling time', without any of the usual stereotypical labels. Here's what she says about it:

'My experience of the premenstrual phase is a truly creative one in which I experience the depths of my own soul. The deeper currents of life come topside and the muse (usually in the form of poetry and creative writing) takes up residence.'

'Because I'm an artist and a poet, around day 21 of my cycle, I consciously slow down in anticipation of what might want to emerge, creatively. I journal about projects that need inspiration, identify areas that need my creative attention and try to make room for them.'

'After many months and years of experiencing this phase as a deeply

soulful and creative one, I've come to expect it to be that way. Perhaps this creates some self-fulfilling prophecies and some necessary space for the muse to spread her wings.'

Opening to your uniqueness

Considering that one of our greatest fears as human beings is a fear of not fitting in and not belonging, it's a saving grace that your inner autumn comes along to ensure your 'polite, socialized self' bites the dust.

Without capacity to truly be who you are, you're in danger of losing your line to the one thing that will bring you Home – you.

Your initiatory journey is, in part, a process of deepening into what makes you distinct and different, while at the same time growing you into the compassion that allows you to feel a deep belonging to life. Finding unity with all of life, through the diversity and inescapable brilliance of your uniqueness. It's your uniqueness – your Wild Power – that is precisely what's needed to surmount the challenge of the premenstruum.

There comes a moment in the premenstruum when you can feel empty, flat and low. Your energy levels are of course reaching their lowest ebb in the cycle, and unsurprisingly, you can feel a bit fragile, emotionally and physically. Your 'steam' is running out and you've probably no more fight left in you.

You may feel saturated, and sick and tired of pretty much everything. If you don't realize you're in the dying days or moments of your cycle you may wonder what's wrong with you – why you suddenly feel so unenthusiastic and lazy. As laziness and wanting to chill and do nothing is not really the cherished thing, many women push themselves through this or just give themselves a really hard time about what they're feeling.

But friends, the cycle is wise and you're being prepared for something. This lack of interest ushers in a superpower – the power to let go and give in.

The power to lose it, drift and give up trying to stay on top of everything and just allow nature to take its course. Don't for one minute underestimate the potency of this power.

In Sjanie's domestic life it could look something like this: for the first two weeks of the cycle she's on to it. Every time she walks past a toy on the floor or a cup on the sideboard she picks it up and packs it away. Enter the lethargy and tiredness of her late autumn and now things look a little different. She just hasn't got what it takes to pick up other people's stuff or to do chores that require precious energy.

Enter the power of surrender – the point where she simply must let go, drop her bundle and allow the domestic chaos to ensue. Who would've guessed that this potent power, one that's hard to muster when the ego is going full tilt and you're full of energy, is readily available at your lowest point.

In much the same way that tiredness at the end of the day makes it possible for you to let go into sleep, this low ebb prepares you to step back from daily life and enter a deeper, more expanded state of consciousness at menstruation.

Your energy is drawing deeply inwards; your spirit knows it's soon going to enter states of spiritual ecstasy. Suddenly the toy and cup are nothing but an annoyance, an annoying distraction from the depths of what you're being called to. No wonder you feel heightened irritation and snap back with a bark at the smallest request.

You can feel quite 'see-through' towards the end of your cycle, as you continue to drop the faces you normally wear to please and impress others. Beneath these masks lies a deep vulnerability that can be quite excruciating to bear.

Your deep self is saying, 'Excuse me, can we have some recognition around here? I'm dealing with traversing the cosmos right now and you're asking me to pick up a frikkin' cup.'

Your Achilles heel may be exposed now and even the smallest criticism could undo you. It's a delicate and fragile energy to live with in the world, and as such it's another invitation to withdraw.

Whilst not for harsh exposure, this tenderness can be an opening into deeper intimacy with yourself, and indeed with those you're close to. Under the umbrella of a safe relationship with yourself and your partner – if you're in a relationship – it can be the doorway into a pure and blessed connection.

We explore this in [Chapters 5](#) and [7](#). If you can bear with this vulnerability, Divine Love will find you. The humbling human experience of the premenstruum goes hand in hand with Divine Encounter.

Inner autumn – initiatory tasks

Your initiatory tasks are to:

- Face yourself
- Clean up your act (i.e. meet the inner critic)
- Stay present
- Be discerning

There are two tasks here that go hand in hand. The first is facing yourself: meeting your shadow side, and cleaning up all that just isn't you anymore, the stuff you've outgrown. While you will come face to face with your personal history and unhealthy patterns of behaviour, you're also called – and this is the second part – to be fully embodied and present with the truth of who you are.

Put quite simply, you're asked to face your shadow *and* claim your light. These two tasks underscore the kind of contradiction that you're asked to bear during the premenstruum. Can you tolerate feeling the truth of two opposing positions? You're faced with this fundamental human challenge on some level each time you traverse your inner autumn.

Essentially, your task is to know and feel yourself as simply human and profoundly divine. To acknowledge your shortcomings, limitations and screw-ups, while at the same time sensing the perfection of you – the rightness of your history and the limitless potential you can leverage.

Another closely linked task is meeting any deep, disturbing feelings inside yourself, without making them wrong or shaming yourself because of them. We refer to this as the practice of ‘holding the tension’, and describe it in detail in [Chapter 9](#).

Can you give yourself the space and permission just to be messy and uncomfortable? Can you breathe into those parts and let them be? Your inner critic is on the prowl and you could easily be flattened by it. Your task is to learn how to meet this critical voice and feel into what’s ‘not working’, without letting your critic run too wild and have you give up.

It’s vital first to really face and feel the difficult, critical forces without rushing to speedy resolutions or simplistic solutions. To hold and feel the tension with awareness creates greater inner spaciousness and deepens you into yourself.

‘It’s a madhouse here. Yesterday I was all angsty that nothing’s going to last forever; everything is so fleeting, blah, blah... And today, in total contradiction, I feel like nothing ever changes.

‘My life will be consumed forevermore with nappy changing, irrational small people and sleepless nights.’

SJANIE, DAY 25

Feedback time

The premenstruum is the classic feedback moment in the cycle. You're being shown exactly what needs your attention, what needs to change, and what isn't working. You get feedback on your overall health and stress levels, how well you're caring for yourself, your relationships, creative projects, spiritual life and more. Your task is to stay present and receive the feedback with as much self-kindness as you can muster.

Coming into the final days of the cycle, your energy at its lowest point, you may feel unresourced, tired or insecure. Your task now is to practise radical self-care and give yourself permission to step away from mundane life.

The more you welcome this less glamorous phase and let yourself be weathered by it, the more grounded and authoritative you'll feel. And the more substantial, meaningful and successful your contribution will become.

By their nature, the premenstrual tasks are more challenging. But conveniently, you have years of cycling to practise and master them. Crack these tasks and you'll have menopause in the bag... well, almost.

Inner autumn – initiatory challenges

The challenge is to enter autumn mindful that you're a force to be reckoned with. To go into it with your eyes wide open and with a keen awareness that your presence, words, and actions pack a punch. Can you use this strength wisely without being heavy-handed or annihilating yourself or others?

Your challenge is to go slowly – to create some space between your feelings and your actions. This isn't always doable and you can applaud yourself for being human if you fall into this briar patch a million times.

Emotions move us to speak and act, and when they're full throttle, as they are in the premenstruum, it requires tremendous self-awareness and discipline to allow your feelings to percolate and then let off some steam privately.

The essence of this challenge is to ride the deconstructive force of the premenstruum without falling into its wake of self-destruction or self-loathing. Unconscious wielding of this destructive power can cause you to self-implode and sometimes turn to alcohol, drugs, binge eating, or whatever other addiction lies waiting in the wings.

Without a dose of inner kindness this season can feel brutal and insurmountable. You could fall victim to your own history or feel victimized by life, as if you're at the mercy of great loathing.

'Feel like Willy Wonka dancing around... Everything colourful. The howling, crying, desperate state of three nights ago is a ghost. And what's with the night before, when sex or chocolate was all I wanted? Chocolate won! Like there was a choice.'

ZEE, DAY 1

It's really important that you celebrate yourself in the crossover from summer to autumn because this will give you the buffer you need to face your shortcomings, blind spots, shadow side and the inner critic. You need to be braced and at the ready to spot when your critic has turned up, and listen to what it has to say.

Our best immediate tip is to say to yourself: Just be quiet and listen.

It may be really hard to hear what your critic has to say, but there's some hidden truth in it that could be gold. You'll find lots more tips and insights on how to meet and manage the critic in [Chapter 6](#).

Simply having your own needs can be a challenge, especially if you've been taught it's selfish or wrong to put your needs first, or if you have a family and are jostled by the competing and relentless demands of your little ones.

Now it's more challenging, as your needs are highlighted ever more strongly. If your needs aren't met, it's easy to get bogged down in reactivity, self-criticism and emotion, and lose the connection with the divine context that gives support and meaning.

While it's classic to hit this moment of overwhelm during the inner autumn – as if your little ole' self is solely responsible for carrying the weight of everything – ironically, the support of the unseen world is more readily accessible now.

A lot is asked of you and you may feel stretched beyond your capacity. This is your psychic workout for the month and your psychological muscles are being stretched and strengthened.

And for those of you who are mothers, do remember that you're no longer in the natural home of the mother, the inner summer, where your own needs are quieter, making it easier to be a 'good mother' in the old-fashioned sense – completely there for your family. This is the socially acceptable and 'expected'

way of mothering because you can give *all* of yourself to your children.

However, to have those moments of effortless giving, you need to come back to yourself, tend to your own 'garden' and give your own needs some attention. And the premenstruum is the perfect time for that. If you resist the autumn and attempt to mother the 'summer way' all month long, you could end up resentful, unresourced and overwhelmed, making it harder and harder to be truly present with your children.

During the inner autumn, part of your challenge is to remember that while you may have healing to do, even so, you're lovable. If this truth evades you during the premenstruum, fortunately you'll receive a loud reminder at menstruation.

In this way the cycle supports you to return to the premenstruum next time with more inner spaciousness and self-compassion. So the powers of insight, discernment and self-expression can continue to be unleashed.

Practice: manage the power of the premenstruum

- As you enter the inner autumn, deliberately pause and find things to acknowledge and celebrate about yourself and what you're doing.
- Go about your life a little more slowly and mindfully.
- Say 'no' more often.

The gifts of the premenstruum

If you're in the depths of premenstrual hell, the following is a little 'Post-it note' for what's actually going on – whether you can see it or not:

- You're returned to yourself; your inner world is amplified, reminding you of your own needs and desires.
- The anaesthetic is wearing off and the critical, forceful, provocative, difficult energy is actually a sign that you're coming to your senses. Not to be apologized for or dismissed as 'just premenstrual', try to regard this difficult energy as the truth being spoken. Learn to channel it more coherently.
- The bubble of illusion is popped. You step out of the mainstream mindset and are restored to a deeper truth: for example, instead of buying into the messages of the media, you see through the manipulation.
- You complete unfinished business – tidying up your life, inside and out.
- The inner critic calls you to account. Meet it in order to grow your inner authority.
- A wild, raw, instinctual, elemental power is waking up in you. Without this you could lose touch with the natural world and become a dried-up husk.

- You're being prepared for Revelation at menstruation.

~ Practice: use MCA to discover your Inner Seasons ~

You can get started right away to bring a seasonal focus to your menstrual cycle awareness (MCA) practice, so you can discover *your* seasonal pattern – signature characteristics, core needs and tendencies and sexual desires. Ask yourself:

- What season am i in now?
- What are your signature characteristics for each season?
- What are your core needs in each season?
- What do you notice about how each season affects your relationship?
- How do you feel sexually in each season?
- What could you do differently to honour and fulfil who you are in each season?

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CROSSOVER DAYS

The crossover days are the moments of the cycle when you move from one phase or inner season to the next, rather like the cross-quarter days of the Celtic Calendar (although what occurs in the menstrual cycle isn't necessarily connected to what happens during the Celtic seasonal shifts).

There are four of these crossover days, and some women notice them more acutely because they 'stumble' or are disrupted in quite distinct, and occasionally intense, ways. Women who've suffered trauma may find certain crossover days disorienting, even disturbing.

Think of your crossover days as mini 'gaps in the fabric of life' – like a void moment. They potentially expose you to emptiness, a subtle sensation of the metaphorical ground giving way under you. This creates an emotional wobble or unease. Mostly this won't be strong – a mere blip on the screen that signals you're changing gear – but where it is intense it can tell you something of your deeper needs or current challenges.

Generally speaking, the more tired or stressed you are, the more you may feel the crossovers.

It's worth remembering that you may always have a moment in the cycle that gets you every time and you just have to laugh and love that foible in yourself.

'When we resist the season's change, we get "divorce" rather than "graduation".'

ROB BELL⁶

It's also worth noting that if you experienced a boundary violation (sexually, emotionally, physically) in your formative years, you could find any or all of the crossover days as problematic or anxiety provoking. It's like a momentary chink in the armouring through which your hidden feelings can speak.

It's worth charting (recording) your cycle attentively enough to get to know your transition days. Along with insight, it brings another level of integration. Just as each season has its tasks, so too the crossover days ask something of you; and it's worth tending to that mindfully when you can. They are like momentary pauses in which to collect yourself and step mindfully into the next season. Nothing more need be done but to allow oneself the interruption.

THE CROSSOVER DAYS IN DEPTH

Below we describe each crossover day (these are depicted on the [map of The Inner Seasons](#)) and in [Chapter 5](#), The Five Chambers of Menstruation, we go into even greater detail on two of them, namely the crossover from inner autumn to inner winter, the first Chamber of Menstruation, and the crossover from inner winter to inner spring, the final Chamber of Menstruation (depicted on the [map of The Five Chambers of Menstruation](#)).

In the following section, we give you a rough approximation of where each transition day can occur in a 28-day cycle. We explain what happens energetically, what's asked of you, and our take *thus far* on what might be going on when you struggle with it. Do remember that Big Red Rule, as your experience of when the crossovers fall may be different to this 'textbook' version.

Menstrual to preovulatory phase (day 5/6)

As you move from menstruation to pre-ovulation, you're asked to hold the intimacy and tenderness you've felt at menstruation and protect your precious insights and visions as you return to the rough and tumble of mundane life.

Jane feels it as 'an upsurging, an awakening, a lifting of the spirits'. She says: 'If I have had a conscious positive bleed I can find myself playing a mental and physical tug-of-war with myself: my body raring to go and my mind thinking it's best not to rush but stay in the menstrual state a little longer.'

That's a fairly classic response. However if, unlike Jane, you fall into a hole here – for example, with feelings of flatness, anxiety, overwhelm, depression, emptiness or grief – it might mean that you:

- Haven't had enough time out at menstruation to sufficiently nourish your body and soul, and not been able to honour and fulfil the spirit of that time.
- Are suffering from overall fatigue; for example, adrenal burnout or chronic fatigue. The menstrual bleed can be draining and there aren't enough energy reserves in you to head back out into the world.
- Are most at home in the menstrual world – you love the intimacy, the holiness, the sense of groundedness and belonging, and feel bereft leaving it. Especially if there's no recognition or acknowledgement of these powers in your outside world.
- Are a high sensitive and find exposure to the 'real' world just too

stimulating and ‘bright’ and therefore overwhelming.

- Have experienced a powerful vision but simply don’t know what to do with it. Or have little support for that vision in the outside world, which can indeed feel bleak.
- Are too eager to rush into ‘normal’ life again and overexpose yourself too soon. Jane, in our example above, is negotiating that tension. If you rest well you’ll be able to hold the charge as she describes, but if not, you might rush out and find you burn out too soon. You may also have an edge to holding your vulnerability and the undefended self you’ve touched, and taking that out into the world. It’s quite possible that many women abandon a small but crucial percentage of themselves at this point.
- Hold something unresolved about your experience of menarche.

‘Someone bring the cotton wool and wrap me in it. Life hurts.’

SJANIE, DAY 5

Preovulatory to ovulatory phase (day 11/12)

As you cross from pre-ovulation to ovulation there's one crucial task for you to do: say 'yes' to yourself, to an idea, to *something*. The cycle is asking you to firm up and commit to whatever it is you're going to pour your summer energy into.

Without committing to something you could spin off out of orbit and get frazzled by the heady heights of summer, or rush around like a 'headless chicken'.

Sjanie has discovered that day 12 is mostly her crossover into summer. In the few days prior to this she feels a huge surge of confidence, wellbeing and sexiness, but on day 12, out of nowhere, the ground gives way beneath her. She feels weak in the lower half of her body, and her legs are like jelly – as if she's losing connection to her whole body. She becomes distracted, disassociated and momentarily forgetful.

When she first experienced it she hadn't clocked it was her crossover and was puzzled and frustrated, unable to shift the feeling. The moment she connected it back to where it was happening in the cycle, everything settled. On reflection her experience revealed her own edge to fully embracing her physical and sexual attractiveness.

This is the easiest transition time for the majority of women, but for those like Sjanie, who can feel a distinctive dip or disquiet in their spirit, it can be connected to:

- An anxiety about the energy of the ovulatory phase, and uncertainty about

how to channel it.

- Not being fully grounded in or connected to your life direction. Or finding it difficult to believe in and commit to yourself.
- Having an edge to stepping out into the bright lights of the world and letting yourself be fully seen for who you are: including feeling safe to inhabit your full sexual power. A woman who has suffered any sexual violation may particularly struggle here.
- Your experience as a young woman leaving the family nest and moving into adulthood, and the greater responsibilities involved in that.

‘I feel a bit like a slightly wounded animal that’s stumbling into the clearing where the hunters lie waiting.’

SJANIE, DAY 13

Ovulatory to premenstrual phase (day 19/20)

After the activity of summer you're asked to take stock of what you've done and acknowledge yourself and your work. This transition is for self-recognition and celebration.

It's the great Thanksgiving moment of the cycle, without which you could enter the premenstrual phase feeling unprepared to meet your critic. Crucially, you're asked to slow down.

Veronica is unable to miss this crossover, whether she's charting her cycle or not. 'There's some energy I don't know how to describe. It starts to be present and I just know it's day 21,' she says. 'My belly feels "very present" and the grrrrrr starts building up. It's a powerful energy that's impossible to control.'

For Maisie, it's also distinct – she simply wants to retreat and enjoy silence. If she can, she'll go to bed, read and generally keep under the radar of everyday pressures for 24 hours. There's nothing wrong with her – it's just her way of allowing her sensitive spirit to shift gear and arrive fully present in the premenstruum.

'As if on cue, the nostalgia flooded in. Longing. Memories. The empty shell of what has been. It's so remarkable, the way I'm faithfully visited by this every month, at this time in my cycle. So much of what seems random is significantly cyclical.'

SJANIE, DAY 19

If you struggle at this point, it could be that you are:

- Grieving at not having sufficiently fulfilled the manifesting power of the ovulatory phase.
- Unconnected, or not fully connected, to your creative potential.
- Wanting a child but haven't conceived, or are unable to.
- Feeling unease about facing your critical energy and shadow side.
- Utterly at home at ovulation and don't want to leave; you're possibly caught up in the hedonism and having way too much fun.
- Not sufficiently grounded.
- Failing to celebrate and recognize yourself.

'I felt the shift from high summer to autumn as clearly as if I'd turned my head to look in a different direction. I retreated a little inside myself, not really wanting to turn away from the glowing, doing and "appealing" me.

'But now I find the insightful part of myself who is the truth-speaker – to myself and others. The one who throws away the rose-tinted glasses.'

TESSA, DAY 20

Premenstrual to menstrual phase (day 27/28)

As you gear down through the premenstruum, and tie up loose ends, you're asked to say your final goodbyes to the world and scoot off alone into your metaphorical cave at menstruation. If you aren't able to slow down and sufficiently sever the line to mundane life, you can't easily drop your bundle and receive the deep blessings of menstruation.

Karim came from a very conservative home, in which her father ruled the roost. An intelligent woman who is mostly self-contained and restrained, just before bleeding she would flip into a highly anxious state that was very distressing. She would isolate herself and sometimes have suicidal thoughts.

This is one crossover day that you really can't be unconscious about – the fallout can be the most extreme. It can be connected to:

- Deep exhaustion.
- An inability to let go.
- Low self-esteem and perfectionism.
- Core wounding from childhood – including abuse, neglect, and even resurfacing birth trauma.
- Lack of sufficient support for yourself.

- Possible grief if you're trying to conceive and have failed for that month.
- Not being in a relationship when you yearn for one.
- Doing too much and pushing yourself.
- Going unconscious, which is easy to do because you're entering a very dreamy, altered state of consciousness.
- Letting yourself be organized by others' timing, rather than pacing your own.
- Fear of the deep spiritual powers of menstruation: the ego death and divine exposure.

'Things reached a crescendo of intensity yesterday. I was then totally side-swiped by an automatic and unconscious lashing of self-destruction before I lay wired awake all night. Like a mini dark night of the soul. Sweetly followed by my blood's innocent arrival today.'

SJANIE, DAY 1

Practice: get to know your crossover days

- As you do menstrual cycle awareness, notice when your crossover days fall.
- Make a conscious effort to slow down and pay attention to these transitions.
- Come back and check this section on the crossovers, for insight into what they may be revealing.

The Inner Seasons are on your side

The Inner Seasons invite you to practise a radical intimacy with your own experience, and help you stay close to yourself without over-identifying with the limitations of who you think you are, or the expectations of who you think you should be.

Knowing your Inner Seasons grounds you in the complexity and paradox of your own being and makes it possible for you to cast a wide net of self-love over those previously orphaned parts of yourself.

Fiercely embracing your shadow side and frayed edges brings a sweet tenderness – the softness that lets more life in – allowing you to ride the evolutionary edge of who you're becoming.

To listen to and follow The Inner Seasons, living your life according to your natural tendencies in each, is sustainability in action and the core of your spiritual practice as a woman.



Chapter 5

The Five Chambers of Menstruation

If you've kept faith with your cycle over the whole menstrual month – and held to its practice by respecting and working with your changing seasonal energy – you're psychologically readied for what we call the inner temple of menstruation.

Thus far, you've worked through two different maps – The Two *Vias*, which frame the cycle process and create the first layer of containment. These open the door to The Inner Seasons – the guide to your nature, unique powers and tasks to realize those powers: to deliver you now to the door of your inner temple, the heart of the process, the holy of holies. The home of your Wild Power – menstruation itself.

INTRODUCING THE MAP OF THE FIVE CHAMBERS

Menstruation is a peak moment of initiation. You go through a dismemberment, a time of unknowing, a time of remembering, recovering and revelation of who you truly are. Finally you're reconstituted into a more integrated and embodied expression of yourself.

These stages of menstruation are reflected in *all* initiatory processes, including childbirth and menopause, and are what we grandly call The Five Chambers of Menstruation.⁷ These are as follows:

- Chamber 1: Separation
- Chamber 2: Surrender
- Chamber 3: Renewal
- Chamber 4: Visioning
- Chamber 5: Clarity and Direction

Opposite is an illustration of the map of The Five Chambers of Menstruation nestled within the inner winter of menstruation (see for the [map of The Inner](#)

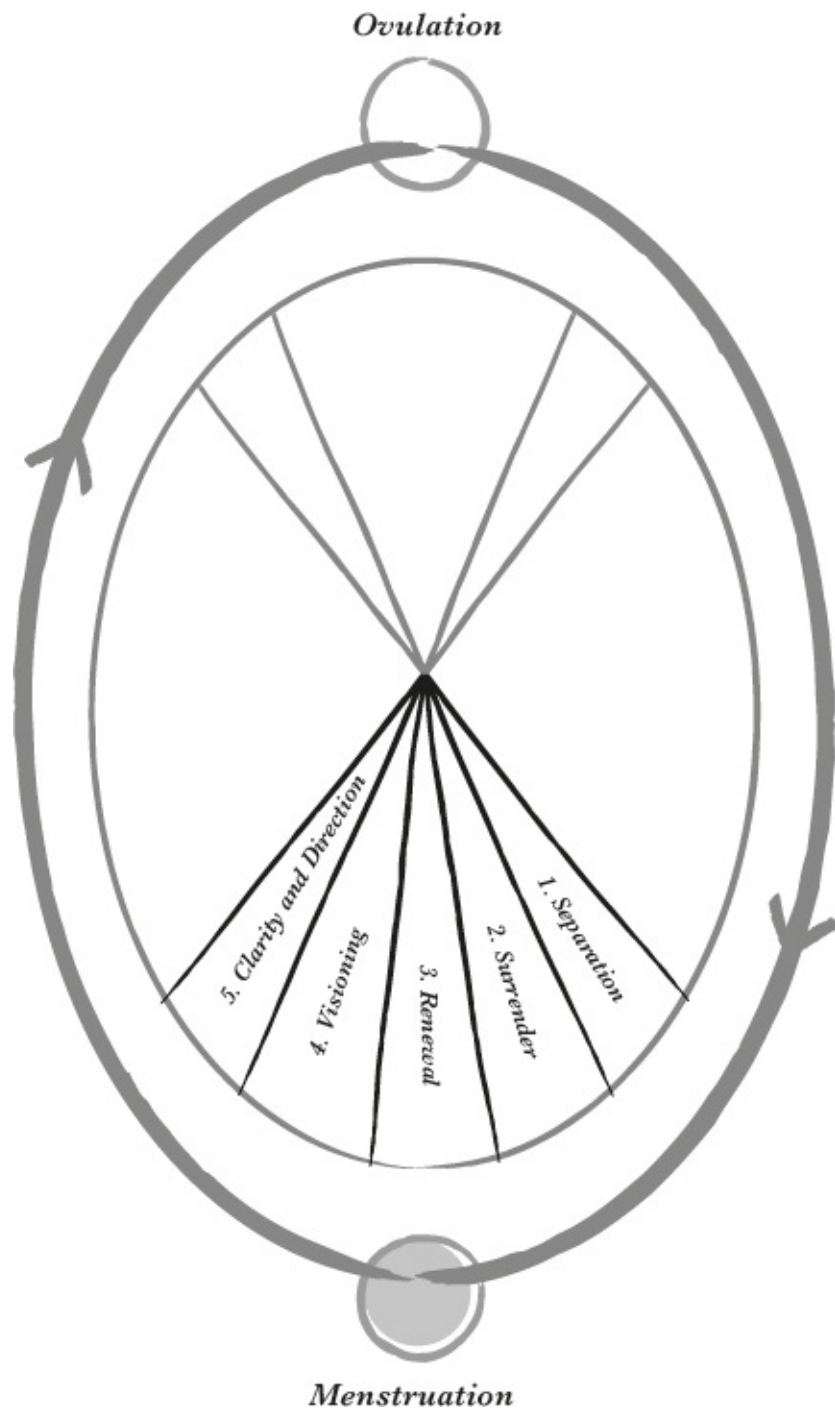
[*Seasons*](#)) and held within the underlying [*map of The Two Vias*](#).

Like The Inner Seasons, each of The Five Chambers holds distinct powers and subtle tasks that, if sensed and honoured, lead a woman into an inner sanctum of profound wholeness and belonging. The menstruality practices throughout this chapter offer suggestions for how you can begin to cultivate these powers.

WHAT ARE THE FIVE CHAMBERS?

As its name implies, **Chamber 1: Separation** is about withdrawing from the world. It's the 'death', the dismemberment of your ego – a transition moment that delivers you to the door of the inner temple. It's also potentially the most spiritually powerful place in the whole cycle. In fact, we call it the Holy Grail.

Chamber 2: Surrender announces itself with the arrival of the bleed (this doesn't include spotting, which for some women occurs before bleeding). This chamber is as it sounds – about letting go, utterly giving in to the moment, being in the unknown and doing nothing.



Map of The Five Chambers of Menstruation

You rest, release and cleanse the ‘stuff’ of your daily life, making space for the

new to come in. As you empty out, you reconnect to the ground of your being and your unique place in the World, in the Cosmos. It's a feeling of having landed and is *the* sure sign that you've arrived in **Chamber 3: Renewal**, and the time of Great Remembering.

In Renewal you're plugged back into the Source. You can experience a womb-like state in which you feel washed by the forces of love. Now is the moment to receive, to drink in the most extraordinary affirmation of your being. We think of the third chamber as the first sign of new life, the new cycle.

Your inner spring stirs and your Wild Power begins to flex its muscles. If you can get a handle on the first and second chambers, the third and subsequent chambers can take care of themselves...almost.

Chamber 3 gives way to the full-on assault of the ecstatic power of **Chamber 4: Visioning**. This is the quintessential Vision Quest time for women. Wild Power speaks to you, and you recover the deep meaning of your life – your Calling. It's usually way too big, but it's all you. You also get answers to questions or life issues you're struggling with. You become the Oracle, visioning both for yourself and your community.

Finally, you begin to feel the energy shift again. As the 'high' eases, **Chamber 5: Clarity and Direction** emerges. You're on the cusp of exiting from the inner temple of menstruation, but there's one more thing for you to receive and that's clarity and direction. We love how practical the cycle is. Having given you ecstatic revelation it now slips in some down-to-earth instructions for the coming month.

You then return to the world again to negotiate your other Inner Seasons, learn more about yourself to return once more to menstruation, and reconnect with the deep ground of your being.

Discover your version of menstruation

While there is an archetypal order to menstruation, some of the qualities associated with each chamber can also emerge at any point. However, when you understand the archetypal order you'll be able to hone and deepen your ability to access all the blessed states of consciousness more deeply and coherently.

If you don't experience a particular chamber, you'll have a way of diagnosing for yourself what's missing, or needs to be cared for. For example, the most common one for women is simply not having sufficient downtime to repair body and soul to awaken their visionary capacity (Chamber 4).

'The best way I can describe the nuances and differences between the chambers is to use the analogy of learning a foreign language. The Feminine Principle is the core language and The Five Chambers are like five different dialects within it.'

'These dialects are similar and yet distinct in their own unique ways. The same texture and tone run through them all. However, each has its own authentic voice that calls to me.'

EDVEEJE

It's also important not to let your literal mind take off, and allocate each day of the bleed to a specific chamber – as though you step through each one in an orderly, structured, textbook fashion. Our psyches are never quite that literal, fortunately.

You feel or sense The Five Chambers in accordance with your own nature and needs.

There's that Big Red Rule again. Our descriptions are approximations; in some instances the Chambers of Menstruation may indeed connect to specific days for you, but they're also quite subtle states of being that can sometimes feel as though they come simultaneously.

This is particularly true for Chambers 2, 3 and 4, which easily blend into each other. However, we deliberately separate them out because there are three distinct functions – releasing and cleansing, receiving affirmation and receiving vision – that could zip by in a blur. The more you slow the pace – slow time down – the more you drop into the exquisite organization of your being: a great holy territory.

'I sometimes get bored with my spiritual practices, such as yoga, but I never tire of my spiritual practice of menstruation.'

SOPHIE

Before we dive into a deeper description of The Five Chambers, here's another word about power. The base power note of all the chambers is the power of presence: your ability to be in concert with the vast, ineffable forces working your life. The power of encounter crescendos at menstruation, delivering you to the return of the power of agency.

In Chamber 3: Renewal you begin to sense the first small signs of your healthy, egoic self-awakening, and with her comes your power of agency. However, we recommend you do nothing more than give her a wink and a smile while you continue to let go and allow Presence to hold you. Even though Agency may be waking up, it is out of its depth here. It's the power of presence that allows you to access the deep revelation and life direction.

THE BREADCRUMB TRAIL TO YOUR INNER TEMPLE

To enter the inner temple of menstruation, you have to be prepared. You can't turn up at the doorway with your everyday consciousness or *via positiva* energy. If you do, you simply miss the entrance, and possibly take a tumble emotionally and even physically – think of all those silly accidents that can happen just before bleeding.

In its wisdom, the cycle prepares you by trying to slow you down so you can handle the increased permeability and be more present to the transition into the temple.

The first task is to be in touch with your whole cycle pattern through the practice of menstrual cycle awareness (MCA). As you honour the changing energies of The Inner Seasons, and recognize the crossover days, you develop both a refined attunement and a greater capacity to 'hold' yourself. These are both key for helping you to follow the 'breadcrumb' trail to the temple.

With cycle awareness under your belt, the first distinct 'breadcrumb' moment is the crossover from your inner summer to your inner autumn. Although menstruation is still a little way off, you're put on notice that you're beginning the descent to the temple. It can feel like a jolt, especially if you love that summer energy. However, engage with it and allow yourself to shift gear.

Clare is a powerful ecstatic, and for her, handling this all begins with watching the threshold into the premenstruum around day 21; if she navigates that crossing well, she is already halfway to being fully present for the Chamber of Separation.

The process of the premenstruum is one of learning to embody more depth,

complexity and contradiction. The more you embody your feelings the more you can integrate your shadow side. If you're not sufficiently present to what happens, or don't have enough self-care to face and tenderly make sense of the erupting feelings, you might label it as PMS.

Taking time to meet and integrate the disowned parts of yourself builds greater coherence, refining the channel through which the divine can flow.

Sometimes powerful feelings are simply the sovereignty (authority) of your soul needing recognition in order to prepare for this sacred time.

The more that happens, the smoother your ride to the temple will be. From day 25 onwards, Clare is on notice from her deep self not to cut corners with her self-care. She needs to be mindful of, and honour, her day-to-day experience of the cycle; she needs to get enough sleep, eat well, speak her needs congruently and not do anything that she isn't fully aligned with. If she holds to this, she's richly rewarded.

Clearing the decks

Hands up how many of you feel the need to clean just before bleeding? Quite a few of you, we suspect. There is for many of us that sudden burst of energy to clean, or clear outstanding jobs. It can be very productive and satisfying.

This energy can also be used to clear up emotional blockages or unfinished business in relationships. Ouch, some of us have been known to be a tad overenthusiastic in that department, especially if we've suppressed our needs and feelings a little too much the rest of the month.

Premenstrually, we become the no-holds-barred, shoot-from-the-hip, tough-talking truth-speaker – our polite, socialized self long since confined to the great dustbin of history.

What an amazing energy to capitalize on in general, and it's a crucial part of the preparation for entering the temple. You have an in-built impulse to clear the decks before retreating. Do you see how your being conspires to make sure you get there each month?

You might find yourself cleaning something you never normally would. Alexandra remembers observing her colleague and friend Laura on the cusp of menstruation. She was hosting Alexandra for a workshop in Italy, and with three hungry sons in need of dinner she was suddenly driven to clean out her kitchen cupboard.

It was hardly an everyday job – possibly not even a once-every-six-months job – and in that moment, quite mad to do. But doing it she was. She was lost in her own very private bubble, that first chamber, menstruation. We laughed. But she did also retreat to the bathroom for a divine hot bath, the door firmly locked to the world – her 1 per cent in a rather busy schedule at that time.

The steady tenderizing, slowing-down process that occurs through the premenstruum prepares you for a smooth and easy entry to the temple. Any effort or push on your part sabotages this.

If you stay close to your inner process, honour the shifting cogs of your being, face your shadow and consider any strong, even challenging feelings as the sovereignty of your soul claiming recognition for this holy time, you'll hear a very precise call to separate. It's your signal for the first chamber, menstruation.

As a culture we have a huge investment in making things happen – that's our power of agency at work. But this power is utterly powerless in this moment. In fact, it actively works against the realization of the glorious states of being of menstruation.

Your last act of will, your power of agency shall we say, will be to say 'no' to the world when you hear the 'call' to the temple, and serenely (we hope) withdraw and let something other take over.

THE 'CALL' TO THE TEMPLE

Like the call to prayer in the Islamic faith, or the Jewish practice of stopping work at sundown on a Friday to go to the synagogue, you have a call to the temple of menstruation. Only your time to down tools and head off is not governed by an outer calendar or clock, but an inner one.

Your ability to 'read' that inner clock depends on being able to recognize the following signals sent by your body:

- You might suddenly feel empty, lost, dislodged, distracted, disconnected, distant from others, ungrounded, anxious, panicky and bored. You may just want to abandon everything and you don't care what happens.
- You may have the 'get me out of here' scream of reactivity, inordinate tiredness, and a need to cry. You may feel needy and want comfort or to be held. Or, alternatively, you may not want to be touched or even looked at.
- You could also feel very dreamy, overexposed and self-conscious. For some, there is the night of insomnia in which they feel supercharged and ecstatic and possibly full of creative ideas. For others, there's a fierce sexual desire and almost anyone will do.
- Or you might simply feel yourself slip into a silent and still inner space – an internal cathedral – your senses hyper-acute as though you have 360-degree awareness. Or, a version of the above.

‘An old aching loneliness, which makes no sense to my rational mind, as by all accounts I’m never alone.’

SJANIE, WHO HAS TWO YOUNG CHILDREN, DAY 27

What occurs has as much to do with your own nature and needs as what’s going on in your life. The more pressured and rushed you are, the more disturbance you feel. Conversely, the more presence and pacing you bring, the more you feel the potential beauty and bliss of this time.

One woman gets a metallic taste in her mouth. On one occasion it came as she was preparing dinner for her husband and children. Suddenly she had an overwhelming need to get out of the situation, fast. She turned to her husband and said, ‘You take over, I’m out of here,’ and walked out of the room.

Such is her authority in that moment, her husband doesn’t argue. You sense that if she didn’t go, trouble would ensue – the food would burn, her magnanimous spirit would sour, and irritations and grumbles would erupt in the family because she’d be suppressing something so primal, so powerful, that would come out anyway.

It was day 27 for Edveeje, and she was enjoying her end-of-day ritual of a glass of wine and conversation with her partner and twin sister. Suddenly, and yet as if in slow motion, her attention drifted. Her awareness became diffused and unfocused, yet all the while she was half-listening to the conversation. The longer she sat there listening, the more tired she became, until she lost all interest in what was being said.

She wanted to get up mid-sentence – without explaining the need to suddenly be alone – eat a simple meal and go to bed. Instead she sat there, not wanting to disappoint anyone, while still feeling that call to go. Finally, her partner looked at her and said, ‘You look like you’re in pain. What do you need?’

His question was her gateway to truth-speaking and she walked through it, knowing the call would only get louder if she didn't. She told them both she was experiencing the 'call to separate' and left the room. It was that simple.

The first signal for Clare is a slight out-of-body feeling. 'I feel altered, as if my perception is shifting,' she says. 'I'm light-headed, like my awareness is bigger than my body. If I can just be, allowing stillness and honouring what's going on, rather than feeling panicky, I'm filled with bliss.'

THE FIVE CHAMBERS IN DEPTH

If the idea of naming the stages within the inner temple of menstruation is new to you, you may find that just learning about this map starts to reveal the depth and subtleties of menstruation. As we describe the archetypal stages in more detail below, that too may help you notice them more acutely in yourself and tap into the full powers of each chamber.

CHAMBER 1: SEPARATION

Heaven and Hell – step into unboundedness

In this chamber you can experience:

- Detachment
- Stillness
- Dreaminess, bliss, joy, wonder
- Prescience
- Exquisite intimacy with life; all feels sacred
- The feeling of being *in* love, whether in a relationship or not
- Union
- Insight into your wounding
- Possible creative ‘downloads’

This chamber is anything from a couple of hours to a few days before the first day of bleeding. Stepping out of your usual everyday identity, you're in the most out-of-body, unbounded, exposed, vulnerable time in the whole cycle.

Potentially, the first chamber holds the full panoply of menstruation's spiritual powers – everything infinite, possible and perfect – but generally we're not sufficiently 'landed' enough to hold it all at once.

Because it's the most spiritually exposed place, the first chamber can also be the most dangerous, volatile, disturbing time – a high holy moment that could plunge you into the deepest darkness.

It's the archetypal death-of-the-ego that can drop you into a sudden terror, or a feeling of abandonment – all the more acute because it feels as though even the Gods and Goddesses have forsaken you. This feeling of betrayal is a sure sign your ego has died and you're exposed to the Great Unknown.

The work of the whole cycle prepares you for this exposure, and the subsequent chambers allow you to integrate it fully. If you can find your way consciously to this first chamber, stay present to your experience and give yourself the time and space to drop into it, the other chambers will arise more completely.

'Pop goes the illusory bubble of feeling life is forever in an invincible body. Now facing the truth of life forever changing, in vulnerable bodies and certain death.'

'It's not just an idea I'm confronted with – it's a feeling coursing through me. Shaking down my inner fixtures.'

SJANIE, DAY 26

Bye-bye to-do list

Menstruation calls you to separate from normal daily life because there's something else for you to experience that can't be accessed in the general 'doingness' of everyday life. Detaching from everyday consciousness, you traverse the void to enter the temple of You.

While it's a passageway to another territory – that of the bleed – in that emptiness, in that death-of-the-ego, you're initiated into the power of the Feminine. She is born out of darkness, out of your complete vulnerability and emptiness. For this reason, we say it's the most radical, transformative moment in the whole cycle.

'I woke up today feeling special. I had a sneaking suspicion that life may be conspiring to love me. A couple of hours later, my blood started.'

SJANIE, DAY 1

Because Separation, or the Void as we also call it, is unbounded, what happens is hard to nail down. Sometimes it can be hell – eliciting feelings of abandonment, despair, even terror. And sometimes it can be heaven – eliciting feelings of bliss, love and union. The key, remember, is your ability to recognize and respond to the call, stay present to what moves through you and stabilize yourself within it.

Remember Clare, who has to practise a fierce mindfulness to find her heaven? If she can stay present and not cut self-care corners, she's rewarded with joy bubbling through her when she arrives at Separation. Here's how she describes it:

'My cheeks hurt from smiling so much. It's like I have this deep secret

inside me, as if I'm holding a treasure.

'I feel a climactic, orgasmic sensuality and fullness. I remember when it first happened, I cried. I was so touched that my perception, my mindset, was open. I've had experiences of being in it for a number of days.

'Even when I've been busy at work it's still ok. I'm kind of gliding about, sensual, graceful. Nothing can faze me if I'm holding it, and it can last from day 26 (of a 28-day cycle) to day 2.'

The darkness of Separation

Charlotte used to feel at the mercy of this chamber – unsettled and rattled – but as she slowed the pace of her life and practised menstrual cycle awareness, she discovered a deep authenticity and truth. This lasted until she'd given birth to her first child.

With the new responsibility of her daughter, and segueing back into work after a year of maternity leave, she was, one month, inexplicably plunged into terrible anguish at Separation. Here's how she describes the experience:

'It was day 30 and I suddenly descended into a rage and grief like I've not known in years. I was up all night, raging, raging, unable to sleep, thinking about the potential hydrogen bomb in North Korea, the Jungle in Calais, all the world's woes.'

'I was feeling this deep sadness, wishing that I could just be invisible and that no one could see me. Then, finally, the blood came. But there was no relief. Nothing. Just more pain and this feeling of just not knowing at all what I needed.'

'I hid in bed while my partner looked after our daughter, but I just couldn't let go. I was worrying about the world, worrying about her, worrying about what the hell I'm doing with my life... just worrying. I felt crazy.'

'It's been many years since I've had a Void and a bleed like that, and it scared me because I thought I had a handle on it to the point where those days were normally filled with gold.'

Charlotte felt as if she'd gone backwards. But no, she was on the cusp of change and potential evolution. After being with her young child exclusively, she was beginning to step back into her professional life again, and wondering quite what

it was she really wanted.

Any life transition is vulnerable for the psyche, and combined with the high vulnerability of the Chamber of Separation, Charlotte was overwhelmed. For her, this was a ‘perfect storm’: a highly charged initiatory time, expanding her into new territory within herself. You need to be resourced – in other words, to have friends or allies you can turn to – to help you stabilize as you move through such transitions.

Generally speaking, you can fall into a hole at Separation if you’re exhausted, do too much for others at the expense of your own needs and ambitions, suffer from a low sense of self, are a high sensitive, or because you’re in a transitional phase in your life.

The despair can also come from being invaded by all the pain and darkness in the world, as well as facing your own shadow. The more sensitive you are, and we are all sensitive ultimately, the more you can suffer for the world.

The Chamber of Separation may be hard for those women who are coping with and recovering from childhood abuse, neglect or early life trauma. Some experience extreme despair or even suicidal thoughts at this point.

Because your defences are dismantled leading into Separation, you feel the psychological impact or fallout from trauma more acutely. The cycle doesn’t create the depression or suicidal feelings; instead, it exposes the wounding. The remedy is tender, professional support combined with menstrual cycle awareness to release and heal from the trauma.

If you struggle with any kind of addiction, at Separation you could potentially fall off the wagon: particularly if you’re also dealing with emotional trauma. The extreme vulnerability of Separation can simply feel too overwhelming and the addictive substance acts as a means to blunt the intensity of it.

We suspect we've all reached for comfort food at Separation – addiction or no addiction – to handle the exposure. It's highly charged and potentially ecstatic, but the combination of that natural high and any addictive substance can be volatile and potentially destructive, as well as dampening the deeper joys of menstruation.

'The pain of Separation is not separating from the world, or from our loved ones, but realizing we have been separated from the Source, from Love.'

TESSA, DAY 28

Chamber 1: Separation – sacred tasks

Your sacred tasks are:

- To say ‘no’ to the world and ‘yes’ to yourself
- To hold the tension of uncertainty, hang out with the Unknown, the fertile void, without reaching for resolution

To access this divine territory, your task is to say ‘no’ to others and ‘yes’ to yourself, pull away from the world and slow right down – almost as though you move in slow motion. Your next task is to hold the tension of the ‘not knowing’, of any uneasiness or discomfort you experience. Simply put, it’s about your ability to hang out with yourself without any agendas or jobs to do.

The action happens on a subtle level and, if you’re busy, you skew the process. But if you can just catch yourself for a second and pause, you may begin to feel that other world of love and bliss heading towards you. On one occasion Sjanie experienced her version of this:

‘A cool calm pervaded my being and the noise of life seemed to drop off into the background. My body was tired and sore but I became aware of a vibrancy around my skin, in the air around my body.

‘My energetic body felt so blissfully vibrant and energized – full of colour and light – but it was wrapped in close around me, protecting me.

'I noticed very acutely how dull, lifeless and empty my physical body felt, versus all of this concentrated life force within my energetic field.'

Because it's such a charged time, and you're so vulnerable, the contrast between the light and the dark can be stark. You easily flip between extremes if you're not mindful. The real magic happens when you can embrace both. And then the Void can be a time of illumination.

~ Practice: discover your call to separate ~

- If you dared to make small adjustments to your schedule to accommodate the gear changes of the second half of the cycle, what would they be?
- What is *your* sign of the call to the temple?
- Dream into what it would be like to follow this call.
- Set an intention for your next bleed to notice and follow your call as best you can.

CHAMBER 2: SURRENDER

The key to the door of Home – release, cleanse, and reconnect with the ground of your being

In this chamber you can experience:

- Detox or release of tension, tiredness and negative feelings
- Deep ‘letting go’
- Grief
- Relief
- Coming to Earth, returning to the ground of your being

‘The world is singing today. Last night I got my period.’

ALEXANDRA, DAY 1

On the first day of bleeding, you enter this chamber. You’ll probably feel a

strong need to stop now, or at the very least go very slowly. We think of this chamber as the key that opens the temple door.

Some women cry at this moment, a sudden emotional release. It can feel humbling, and as though you're grieving for the extraordinary limitlessness or vastness of no body at Separation. Simultaneously, you drop any lingering vestiges or veils to be fully embraced by the Divine.

In the process of being in the mundane world we accumulate 'stuff' – feelings, 'stuckness', tensions, hurts, fears, anxieties, struggles with who we are – and in this moment we release them. There's no effort on your part. Release happens as you surrender to your body's needs. All you have to do is give in, and this is the most challenging part for many of us.

You think you simply can't afford to stop – there's just too much to do. You feel guilty because you haven't done enough and haven't earned the right to stop. Or to cap it off, you subscribe to the notion that the need for rest is a weakness. But what's worse is not to rest.

In our via positiva culture, there's an ignorance of the power of 'doing nothing', and you're about to discover this power.

We should also add that you can't avoid the need to stop – either you do it consciously or you get tripped up through illness, addictions or other nefarious schemings of your body.

You may also encounter another reason not to let go: fear. A fear that if you *do* stop, you'll be overwhelmed by unwelcome feelings, or knowledge that could challenge the very basis of your life and the way you do things. And so you don't turn the key in the door. This hesitation must be respected, and by that we mean tenderly faced.

Veronica loves this menstruality work, and creates both time and space to stop.

Yet still she circles Surrender, distracting herself with this and that and never really giving in. She's struggled with depression over the years, and staying proactive and engaged with the world has kept it at bay.

A woman of great sensitivity and integrity, it's as though her being knows there's huge depth here that must be respected and paced. We should also add that some women need to feel really, really safe before they can let go.

'Reaching out from my cave to share with you how surprised I am at how difficult it is for me to surrender to the beauty of doing absolutely nothing.'

VERONICA, DAY 2

Try a little tenderness

Hold great tenderness with yourself and trust the wisdom of your body, which is, in all likelihood, calling you to a soft pile of cushions, your sofa or bed with some gentle music and softened lights and no one, but no one, asking anything of you.

Once you let go, you'll discover the great secret of Surrender: feeling empty is ok, even a relief. The mind is in neutral mode and you coast along without any effort.

About the only effort we want you to exert is to lift your hand languidly to pop an occasional healthy delight into your mouth, like some decadent Roman emperor. If that isn't possible just yet, drop all pressures on yourself today: time pressures, performance pressures, exercise pressures, perfect parenting pressures, good friend pressures – you name it, drop them all. It's the day to drift, saunter, wander and *be*.

Essentially, we want you to get your normal everyday pushing self out of the way so that you can move at the actual pace of your being, which is going to be much slower. Your magical body then gets on with the business of release and repair.

You might feel quite tender and raw, and want to have a good old cry. Or you might be angry. Or find you simply cannot move. Whatever emerges, let it happen. You'll probably notice you don't want to think about anything or make any decisions. Don't. You're going to find the answers will come later anyway.

'It feels a lot like when someone loving and compassionate really sees me and I can't help but melt into tears.

'I feel I've been met, seen and understood. It's like the arms of the

Mama reaching out to me, allowing my really deep, tender feelings to start to unravel. Feelings shrouding my heart, the veils to intimacy and connection, are released.'

SJANIE, DAY 1

Time to repair

After organizing and translating one of Alexandra's first workshops in Italy, Laura bled the next day. Yep, that's right, unbelievably, despite her best efforts, the workshop took place during the two days before her bleed – the Chamber of Separation. (This has to be one of those moments in which we may want to curse our period!)

On the morning after the event, Laura could not move or even speak. She was lost to the world but deeply tracking something inside – getting revelation after revelation about herself, almost in the form of dreams.

After two hours she emerged as though something had completed itself, ate a little food and left to do her part-time job, albeit tenderly and slowly. By withdrawing deeply into herself and not moving or speaking, she released a lot of the tension that had built up from organizing the event, and came out almost reborn. She was, of course, tired and still needed much more rest.

What this story illustrates is the ability of menstruation to repair, if we let it. Surrender is the first part of the stress repair process that menstruation offers, and the more stressed you are, the more you may find you cannot move. (The second part happens in Renewal.)

The Chamber of Surrender can vary in length according to your energy levels and life responsibilities. In general if you're in your 20s and in good health you'll probably go from Surrender to Renewal fairly seamlessly, but possibly not so deeply. If you're in your late 30s or early 40s, and especially if you have children, this chamber can feel like it goes on for days. You feel you can't get enough rest and it's hard to feel the Renewal kick in.

This partly speaks to the level of tiredness, but also the older you get, the more

expansive the whole territory of menstruation becomes. It's as though your spirit is seeking greater depth – hungrily reaching deep into the inner recesses of your being, and yearning to claim as much as it can from this cleanse-and-release phase.

Curiously, as if in complete contrast to the need to let go on the first day of bleeding, it's not uncommon for some women to feel a momentary surge in energy that's potentially intoxicating. This usually occurs just as the bleeding is beginning, before the full flow.

This has been equated with kundalini awakening – not so much physical energy but more an ecstatic upsurge. The tendency might be to go out and do something with this energy, such is the *via positiva* dominance of our culture.

One woman told Alexandra that she played her best netball on that day. However, we would caution against using this energy in a *via positiva* way; rather, we believe it's meant for the renewal of your body and spirit. And for that to occur, you do need to surrender into it rather than use it.

Chamber 2: Surrender – sacred tasks

Your sacred tasks are to:

- Burn your list of things to do
- Rest, potter and drift with the pace of your actual being
- Surrender to what needs to be released in you
- Trust the process

Your sacred task at this point is to do remarkably little: just rest, sleep and trust that the world will not come to an end if you're not fully on the job. It's a great act of trust in yourself that you'll be taken care of, whatever that might mean.

This act of surrender turns the lock in the door to Home (our other name for the Chamber of Renewal) and roots you in the Ground of your Being, your Self. This simple act of giving in allows for the release of the love and bliss hormone oxytocin, which coats you in a soothing and blessed energy field, like a cowl covering you.

The second part of the stress repair process that menstruation offers, it feels not unlike being back in the womb, and is the signal that you've arrived in the

Chamber of Renewal.

‘When I enter Surrender I start to strongly feel the support of being in my body. The blood is like an umbilical cord – the lifeline to nourishment, growing and allowing me to then receive the renewal and nourishment that will come in the next chamber.’

SJANIE, DAY 1

Practice: invoke surrender

- If you had no cares or commitments, what would you love to do when your blood begins to flow? let your fantasy roam wild and free.
- Can you give yourself 1 per cent or more of that?
- Do the 1 per cent: it's always doable and it has an effect.

CHAMBER 3: RENEWAL

Home at last – fill up with Love, receive the Mother Hug

In this chamber you can experience:

- The oxytocin wash, the Mother Hug, feeling loved up
- The remembering of your Self: ‘I have a place; I belong’
- Groundedness, meaning and wholeness

You have fully arrived in the inner temple. This is both the place of greatest depth and the beginning of the ‘lift’ of the new cycle, although there’s nothing to be done about it. Your ‘business’ is to give in and receive. It’s the conception moment of you – the coming together of your Divine spark and your earthly, embodied self.

The Divine has found its Home in you. You experience the utter specificity and rightness of who you are. All feels well and deeply meaningful. There’s a protection here that allows you to experience the full integrity of your being, a great big massive ‘yes’ to yourself that no shame or doubt can penetrate. Imagine women dosing up on *this* every month.

Surrender in the previous chamber has released the catch on the metaphorical trapdoor to Love and now it comes flooding through. You're being filled by Love: this is the oxytocin wash in action.

Oxytocin gets activated through touch, making love, giving birth and breastfeeding, and when your womb contracts as you bleed, contributing to all those amazing energies of bliss, oneness, belonging, safety and restoration at menstruation.

You begin to deeply repair all that's fractured or wounded in you. You are held, and nothing is being asked of you beyond your ability to allow Love in. And, of course, you're filling up your energy tank as well.

'A sense of being lovingly forged. An alchemical process at work. Like a precious creation being tended to, month after month. I feel so at peace with myself and my body, and with this world. All is exactly as it needs to be.'

SJANIE, DAY 2

Letting Love in

For some, it can be hard to let go sufficiently to let the Love in, perhaps because of a habitual defended state, a lack of psychological safety or physical time and space. But once risked there's no going back, and you won't want to. If you suffer from low self-esteem, recognizing and consciously engaging with this phase helps to rebuild the forces of self-belief and self-acceptance.

Jane regaled us with her experience of menstruating while at work one day. She's an engineer and was, at the time, inspecting railway bridges in North Wales. The only woman on her team, on this occasion she was up the ladder doing the inspection while her colleagues waited below.

Jane was off in another world, one minute wearing her engineer's hat checking the bridge, the next in paroxysms of ecstasy as waves of love flooded her being. She felt like she was being loved by the Great Mama herself. As the love eased, she'd go back to checking the bridge, but then came the next wave, or 'hug'. Quite glorious.

The men below were, of course, entirely unaware of the cosmic forces being enacted above them, for Jane still managed to do her job. Ever since she told us this story, we have called the Chamber of Renewal the time of the Mother Hug.

Although Jane experienced that love up a ladder at work, Mandy, mother of three children, the youngest of whom is still breastfeeding, struggles to access this moment because she doesn't have sufficient time and privacy for herself.

She remembers its power before the birth of her youngest, when she was able to have some time alone to be totally present: 'Just allowing and then suddenly I am there, not by force, and experiencing the jaw-quivering ecstatic moment of total self-acceptance.'

Charlotte is similar. Before having children she had a good sense of her chambers but now it's very subtle. Her current tender signal of Renewal is 'having a thought about something that's been bothering me but is now dressed with a glimmer of hope instead of worry. Or I have an idea for how to go forward with something that has been troubling or perplexing me. I can't stress enough how subtle this is. These ideas fall like leaves on a still pond – gently, gently, and they are precious and few.'

But they are something Charlotte can hold onto as she navigates the early years of parenting. Breeda, on the other hand, came to the menstruality work after she'd done the early years of parenting. Here is her experience of Renewal, in the context of the first two chambers:

'I separate very much before bleeding and am practically incoherent – I couldn't care less about anyone, my children and my life neglected. Surrender happens when I bleed, but I've been noticing the more perimenopausal I become, the less I experience the relief of Surrender. The Renewal, blessedly, is still there.'

'I've always felt Renewal as a soft bliss I've come to rely on to top me up with a sort of kindness for the month. It feels very expansive, love-filled and rarified and lasts two days before it fades. I really hope it's not going to leave anytime soon. So long as I don't have to speak, I experience it strongly, although it's much nicer to be alone.'

The Chamber of Renewal is like the first awakenings of spring itself – new life begins to speak.

The temptation might be to seize that moment and rush back out into the world again. However, don't be fooled: you're not out of the temple yet, there are still a couple more chambers to explore. These awakenings still need to be held in the deep earth of you for the full initiatory blessings of menstruation to complete themselves.

Renewal is also the archetypal moment for intention-setting because you're in

the heart of the temple, facing the metaphorical ‘altar’ of you. On that altar you can place your deep, heartfelt yearnings, the questions you need guidance on, and any clear intentions you want to manifest in your life.

Of course, you can set an intention any old time of the day or night, but this is a highly potentized time in which the spiritual forces are most readily available. We call this approach to getting guidance at menstruation, the ‘Bleed on It method’. We explain how to do it in [Chapter 9](#).

Finally, in this chamber your conscious personal power is being switched back on. Up until this moment it has been a surrender to ‘thy’ will. You’ve sustained the power of encounter and still need to continue doing so, but now come the first stirrings of ‘my’ will: your power of agency, that egoic sense of self that is so necessary – when held in a larger consciousness – to go out and manifest things. Your deep sense of belonging in Renewal is what awakens your Calling in the Chamber of Visioning.

‘Yesterday I was held by the Mother. In my newness; delicate and tender. Needing a coating of Love to give me form and distinction. Today I feel a solidity: an individuation. I know that I can separate from Her. But I’m not yet ready.’

TESSA, DAY 3

Chamber 3: Renewal – sacred tasks

Your sacred tasks are to:

- Rest, rest some more and continue doing nothing much at all
- Receive

These have to be the most delicious of tasks. As much as you can, continue to give yourself rest, or move and act in a restful, non-pushy way. Your task is to drink in the blessings and nourishment of this chamber – of love, of affirmation of yourself.

Allow yourself to receive something of this, regardless of where you are and what's happening. Allow others to do things for you. Whatever the situation, surrender to it; don't step forward, allow space for someone else to step in and maybe 'serve' you in some way.

~ Practice: receive the Mother Hug ~

1. Keep holding private space and time for yourself.
2. Give yourself some of the key conditions that allow the oxytocin to flow (aka the Mother Hug); these include dimmed light (candles are great), soothing sounds and quiet, slowness, safety; make no demands on yourself – internal or external.

CHAMBER 4: VISIONING

Open to Revelation – your Wild Power speaks

In this chamber you can experience:

- Ecstasy – an outpouring of your being, the consequence of love
- Visioning – the realization of who you are, what you're about, your Calling, inspiration, the 'aha' moment
- Supercharging

After 'conception' at Renewal comes the first metaphorical division of the cell: the awakening of your unique contribution to the world, your Calling. Through the previous chambers a space has been created in which to remember who you are. At Visioning, you're present to receive what the Soul of the World is asking of you, what your role is in serving the Whole.

This is your Wild Power speaking. You become a natural visionary, an oracle – an ecstatic speaking not just for yourself but for your community, for the world.

Your Calling, or Wild Power – the mysterious force that organizes your life, directs the unfolding of something utterly unique through the particularity of

who you are – gets to speak in full technicolour now.

‘T.S. Eliot says it best today: “at the still point, there the dance is”.’

SJANIE, DAY 4

This is the Vision Quest time for women, and although the vision may be vast you must follow it. Alexandra always felt she was watching a firework display of images and ideas going off in her head that would leave her oohing and ah-ing at the wonder of it.

She could be still and blissed-out if she was bleeding at dark moon or very high and ecstatic at full moon. If you’re already a high sensitive or naturally ecstatic, the full moon time could potentially blow the fuses if you’re not careful.

The vision or inspiration can be a picture or an idea in your head, a deep knowing in your bones or a revelation that quietly makes itself known to you. It can also seize you with startling clarity: so powerful that you feel impelled into action right away. While it’s crucial to catch the download – we call it ‘taking dictation from the Divine’ – *don’t* action anything at this moment.

Your being is wide open, highly sensitive and still learning to hold its ecstatic divine spark in your physical body.

Focused doing (your power of agency) at this point interrupts a subtle integration process that could leave you jangled and disoriented; you may be too easily open to invasion by others’ ideas and agendas, or simply exhausted.

Lisa found out about the exhaustion all too painfully one month when she was seized by many brilliant ideas. She’s a woman with strong ambitions and no shortage of creative inspiration, but at menstruation her direct line to the creative source becomes, frankly, a superhighway of ideas. At one bleed she couldn’t contain herself and began excitedly working with the ideas pouring through her.

By the time she got to ovulation she was spent, her energy as flat as a pancake. This was followed by her worst premenstrual and menstrual time, as her endometriosis flared up again. Since she'd begun living her life in sync with her cycle, her pain had abated.

This was a great illumination for her that she must not compromise the downtime of menstruation. Rather than being a limitation, it creates for her more overall energy and resilience with which to achieve her ambitions.

At Visioning, your egoic self gathers energy; it even possibly chafes a little to get going, especially if you've rested well. Yet still, we say, don't push: continue to let go and allow. It's a delicate balancing act between being who you are (encounter) and who you're to become (agency). This tension – a healthy tension – is as it should be and how the alchemical magic of menstruation works. So hang in there, it's worth it.

'Oh wow, my Calling just called.'

ALISON, DAY 4

Chamber 4: Visioning – sacred tasks

Your sacred tasks are to:

- Be present
- Continue letting go

If you've been able to honour the previous chambers, they'll deliver you to a deep connection to yourself, allowing you to bear witness to the inspiration and revelation that is seeking you. All that's required is that you continue to surrender to the present moment and keep a sweet intimacy with yourself.

Practice: take dictation from the Divine

1. Have a notebook, paper, pen, crayons, audio device – whatever your medium for recording – ready, and as ideas come, don't argue, just record them. Yours is not to question why at this point, but simply to receive.
2. Hold the charge, stay inside your own skin, keep breathing, keep your nervous system soothed; dance, if it helps.

Your inner winter is now coming to a close, but there's one last experience to complete it and to prepare for the coming menstrual month: the Chamber of Clarity and Direction.

CHAMBER 5: CLARITY AND DIRECTION

Instruction for the road ahead – down-to-earth guidance for your next steps

In this chamber you can experience:

- Clarity and guidance on what to do next, often quite specific
- A quiet inner knowing
- Increased focus and resolve
- An impetus to initiate something

This chamber is the time of Return from your Vision Quest. How you transition back into mundane life again is everything. Clarity and Direction is the exit lounge from your inner temple: a transition space not unlike Separation and likewise holding unique gold of its own.

During menstruation, you've been held tenderly, coming through a profound process of awakening to your undefended self. Now, you must return with this experience and knowledge to what can often feel like the harsh, crude realities of day-to-day life. If this isn't done with awareness and some grace it can jar,

causing you to subtly shut down to your inner majesty and don the robe of an enculturated self.

Your vision may be huge and you may not yet have much or any language for it, but in this chamber there comes a sign, a direction, about what to attend to next. It might be a quiet knowing or very specific instructions on your next steps. But if you're rushed or overly focused you can override this inner knowing.

It's not dissimilar to the moment of transition from sleep to waking, while trying to hold on to your dreams. If you get up too quickly you can easily forget the dream. Sometimes you have only the tail end of it and have to remain very still, trying to coax the full dream back.

So it is with Clarity at this moment. While very real, this phase is subtler than the Visioning phase, and needs you to move gently so you can catch the very sure instruction or direction that's often possible.

Suddenly, you'll find yourself think or say to yourself, *Go do x or y*. On one occasion Sjanie was struggling over a particular issue that she then took into her bleed, hoping for guidance. A very clear, unequivocal voice said to her in this chamber: *Stop complaining. Actively seek out joy*. She got it instantly, and signed up right away to this new philosophy, which helped liberate her considerably from the issue she was struggling with.

'WOOOOOOAAAAAH! Clarity. I emerge. This insight is magnificent. I feel I can truly harness the next two weeks of imagination and action. I feel like I'm in the stalls waiting, pumped, ready to run.'

LINZI, DAY 4

The instructions are usually pragmatic, specific, seemingly mundane and doable: sometimes issued as a command to yourself. For Fynn, it feels like 'a sharp crystal blade cuts away the clutter; a wonderful, unemotional certainty of what works and what doesn't, along with a surge of energy which, if ignored, leaves

me feeling thwarted and irritated.’

The real challenge of this phase is to hold true to your own timing and not get organized by society’s.

You’re emerging from a womb-like energy field – a bit like a newborn chick hatching from the egg, or a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. You are vulnerable but holding all the magic of new life. Added to that vulnerability is the rising energy of your egoic self with its natural flair for Agency.

You might feel an urgency to get going, perhaps even thinking you’ve ‘indulged’ yourself for far too long. Lou – a wife, mother and yoga teacher – had a sudden insight that she rushes because she has an edge to staying truly ‘with’ herself – with the vulnerability that allows her to know herself deeply – and thus subtly compromises herself, her truth.

Stay connected

We suspect now that this tendency to rush may be less about time pressures and more about our ability, or lack thereof, to hold to that deep knowing of ourselves as we engage with the world again.

You're not a machine. You don't flip automatically from one world to another, but rather, gradually transition. The outer 'lights' slowly come up and your inner 'lights' dim. Your outer 'skin', which was gently dismantled so you could enter the temple, must now begin to thicken or toughen up again.

We say 'toughen' cautiously, because we don't want you to toughen so much that you lose your ability to feel and know yourself, or put back on the old defensive armouring that you no longer need. But you do need sufficient 'skin' to cope with the world.

Rest assured, on the surface you'll look entirely normal – going about your everyday business – but on the inside you'll be holding an inner awareness of your newly hatched self as she quietly finds her feet again.

For some women this transition is hard, causing depression, grief or a collapse in energy, just as they should be gearing up for action. Generally the women who suffer here can be high sensitives who feel much more comfortable with the premenstrual and menstrual phases and therefore grieve having to leave them.

Alexandra was like that. The Return also felt bleak because there was no recognition of where she'd been. She was experiencing the most divine states of being and would then arrive back in a world that denied it all, to the point where she could doubt it herself on occasion.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, a woman can also crash if her overall

energy is poor – if she's suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, say. If you're a woman who struggles with this crossover into the inner spring, go tenderly. It does pass: the impulse of the new cycle will finally win and carry you out.

If you're most at home in the first half of the cycle, this crossover day is possibly the easiest, but it's not without danger.

Your tendency is to speed off in top gear, potentially severing the thread to that sweet intimacy with yourself. The capacity to stay present and pace yourself is everything if you're to hold the thread to your true self. If you can do this, you get the guidance, the next step, to translate the enormity of who you are – your vision – into an embodied life.

'New, raw and permeable. The perfect conditions for truly seeing. The insights are coming now, thick and fast.'

ZEE, DAY 5

Chamber 5: Clarity and Direction – sacred tasks

Your sacred tasks are to:

- Pace yourself and not let the timing of others organize you
- Sustain attention to your inner truth; to hold the thread to your inner self

As you arrive in the exit lounge, be mindful of it as a transition – you're straddling two worlds, one of deep, protected intimacy and one of high exposure. Both worlds are glorious in their different ways.

Mindfulness is the name of the game to fulfil the sacred tasks of pacing and sustaining inward attention. It's almost as though you can feel the intricate mechanics of your being shift gear – renegotiating your relationship to the *via positiva* again.

Practice: sustain attention

- Keep your schedule as spacious as possible.
- Choose to limit incoming stimuli – TV, social media, news, etc.
- Journal or write things down, to catch your thoughts.
- You might enjoy a simple ritual to close the metaphorical temple doors for that month. if you wore a special pair of earrings for your bleed, this is the moment to take them off or change your menstrual altar if you created one.

Rounding up

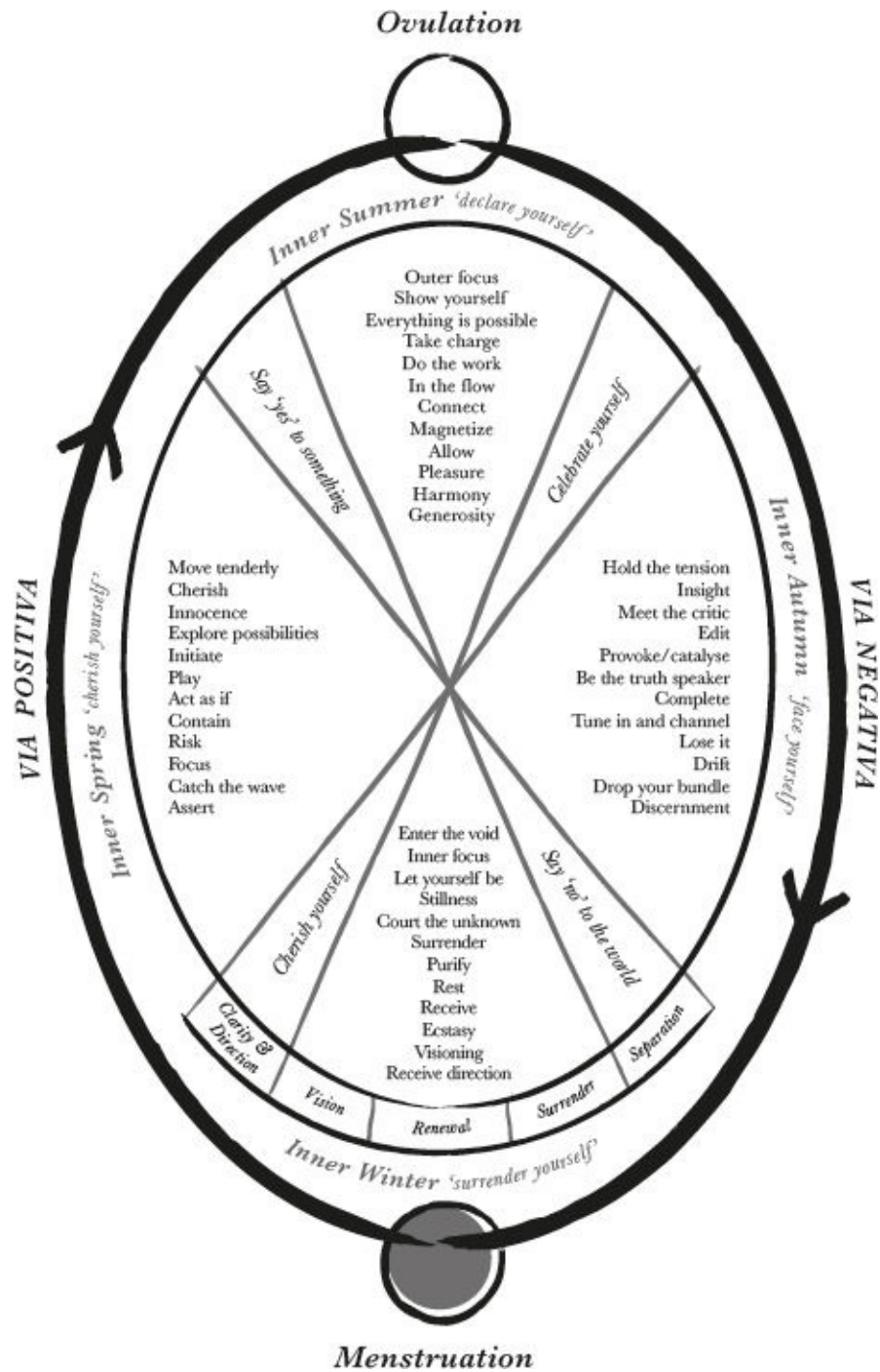
The ‘Menstruality Power Chart’ on the next page summarizes the archetypal powers of The Two *Vias*; the natural powers of each Inner Season, and the seasonal initiatory tasks; the imperatives of the crossover days; and the sacred tasks and powers of The Five Chambers of Menstruation. You can use it as a quick reference guide to the power of the menstrual cycle.

THE BIG BLEED

Plan ahead for your ideal menstrual experience.

We've described the huge possibilities of menstruation and reading all this could potentially leave you feeling rather disheartened. After all, who has the time and space to truly fulfil this glorious potential? We recognize that having the time to fully experience menstruation each and every month is probably going to be well nigh impossible.

However, we have a remedy we call The Big Bleed. Essentially, this means giving yourself a one-off ultimate menstrual experience. Because this is likely to blow your socks off, leaving you gasping with awe, there's every chance you'll find yourself planning for another Big Bleed as soon as possible.



The Menstruality Power Chart

'Feeling a renewed appreciation of life, this precious, precious life.'

SJANIE, DAY 6

This is what happened to one woman, the mother of a young child who also has many creative projects on the go. She has little time and space for the luxury of a good bleed. But after a one-to-one session with Alexandra, it became blatantly clear to her that she simply had to give herself one. She went out on her own into nature just before her bleed had begun, but was driven back inside on Day 1 because of the cold. On Day 2 she decided to try outside again:

‘I sat out on my hill alone and was hit by profound self-realizations. I finally understood something about myself that had been troubling me my whole life but had been unable to see as it had been in my blind spot.’

‘I was, and still am, completely knocked out by the depth of clarity I experienced. This was something that I could have gone my whole lifetime without knowing. Constantly running into pain in my personal relationships because of it, yet unable to see what was causing the problems.’

KATE

Another mother, of two young children, who also runs her own yoga studio and training courses, got this space once, though not by design. She fell very ill at menstruation and simply could not move. Almost pinioned down by the illness, she found herself travelling down, down, deep into the most extraordinary expanded spaces. Here’s how she describes it:

‘I think that experience will be with me forever. Everything was so highlighted – why I became ill, how to heal it, where to move from there. Deeply intuitive knowing: like I know that I know.’

‘It was so beautiful and it also planted an imprint in my body on how important it is for me to take that time.’

LAILA

~ Practice: experience a Big Bleed ~

- Set a clear intention, for however long, to feel utterly free from all responsibility for everything. (Your aim is to give yourself something more than before). go completely off the radar – including no internet connection – so that you may drop deeply.
- If you can do it, heading out into nature is ideal.
- Plan ahead – it might be two or three months ahead – to give yourself a bleed without commitments. line up all your allies for childcare: partners, friends, family, babysitter.
- If you have gainful employment out there in the world, take a flexi day or two off.
- Consider a solo retreat: ideally one where you are waited on hand and foot. in the uK we know of one or two women offering this ‘red tent’ space for a fee. (See our online resources at www.redschool.net/resources)

Now that we’ve outlined the different stages of menstruation, there’s one more glorious aspect of it for you to experience. It’s possibly the pinnacle of the whole process, and we call it the Holy Grail.

But before we can explore this phenomenon further, we have the small matter of

the *ahem*... ‘gatekeeper’ to negotiate. That gatekeeper is your inner critic. And, believe it or not, it’s on side to help you open the door and find the Holy Grail. So let’s be brave and go meet that gatekeeper.





Part III

Meet, Manage and Live Your Wild Power

Chapter 6

The Sacred Role of Your Inner Critic

On the surface, your inner critic appears to be the scourge of your life – undermining your confidence, pricking the bubble of your hopes and dreams and generally sapping your energy. When we speak of the inner critic, we're referring to the part of us that points out all the ways we're failing, or 'not good enough'; it's a constant in our lives.

As women, we also live in a sea of criticism today, with all of society's exhortations about how we're 'supposed' to be. When we're unconscious of that, the inner critic feeds off this cesspool of 'shoulds' and 'oughts'.

This creates an inner toxicity – in particular, feelings of shame and self-loathing. The inner critic doesn't notice or name our achievements, and unless we can do that for ourselves, as a counterbalance to the negatives, we can end up feeling completely paralysed.

Superficially, the critic attempts to keep us safe. Generally it does this by keeping us small, and toeing the party line. Should we decide to stick our heads above the parapet of normal consensus reality and follow our own unique, original impulses, the critic can be triggered ever more strongly. In fact, it's often a sure sign you're on to something significant and true to you when your critic suddenly goes into overdrive.

Can there be anything useful lurking in what's often a very destructive force? Our resounding answer is 'yes'.

By practicing menstrual cycle awareness, you can restore the inner critic to its rightful home – the premenstruum – where it can play its vitally crucial role in your initiatory journey. This will help you to build your inner authority, your capacity to fulfil your Wild Power and find the deep holy places of menstruation.

A HEALTHY DOSE OF KINDNESS

Criticism is a double-edged sword: it can either ‘kill’ you off or ‘awaken’ you to a new level of self-recognition and power. Which way it goes depends on your awareness, your ability to take responsibility for who you are, and a healthy dose of kindness and tenderness for your vulnerable, messy parts.

A few thousand years or more of patriarchy telling us how weak, bad and lesser we are as women hasn’t helped us much. So dealing with our critic can be challenging. It’s wise not to always go it alone. Have some allies on hand, such as a listening partner (you’ll learn about this practice in [Chapter 9](#)), a women’s circle, or a wise counsellor who can support you as you learn to stand up to the critic.

The ideas we present in this book are a beginning – a foundation – that we believe can gently begin to shift the axis of your relationship to the critic, from destructive to creative. And much of what we say about this figure, and how to handle it, can also be applied to the criticism you receive from other people.

In this chapter we describe the inner critic’s vital role in your developmental journey (referring to the map of The Inner Seasons, and the importance of each season in turn for holding the critic in its rightful place); the critic’s job in pricking the bubble of illusion, ensuring you clean up your act and address your shadow side; and useful ways to meet, manage and harness the critic’s creative gifts in preparation for entering the Holy Grail of women.

THE CRITIC'S ROLE IN THE INITIATORY JOURNEY

The critic is the archetypal 'monster' that you have to meet on the initiatory path. But there are stages – your Inner Seasons – that prepare you for this meeting. Let's look at each in turn.

Inner spring

In the inner spring of your menstrual journey you set off full of innocence, optimism and possibility. But for all the promise and possibility, you and your ideas are still vulnerable, and not ready for too much exposure or criticism. More growing time is needed.

If you're mindful of this vulnerability, and honouring the energy and tasks of the inner spring, you'll find that your critic has little purchase. The rising energy of the cycle acts partly as a sort of buffer against untoward negative influences.

However, women who have suffered any kind of struggle or violation in their adolescent years can sometimes find it hard to stay fully present to this phase. This allows their critic to invade, and undermines an already tender self.

It's not unlike a bad frost killing off the tender new shoots of spring. While we may not be able to control the weather, we can, with time, learn to meet the chill wind of our critic and redirect it away from these tender parts, where it does not belong.

Inner summer

In the next season, summer, you're generally at the peak of your vitality. The activity and exuberance of this phase – and the natural self-confidence that accompanies it – act as a brake to any negativity.

You're probably at your least sensitive now, and therefore less permeable to the critic's wiles. Your business is to get on with business, show yourself to the world and make real some of your ideas and ambitions.

In fact, it's crucial you do this in preparation for meeting the 'monster', the critic, in your inner autumn. If the critic does manage to inveigle its way in and trample on your flourishing ideas, your natural flow may be interrupted, leaving you feeling paralysed, uncertain or lost.

You could also find yourself having an attack of shame, instead of enjoying the natural free expression of your summer. If you don't utilize this season's gift – for example, if you're unable to honour and crack on with what's important to you – you'll hear about it from your critic in the premenstruum.

Inner autumn

Your inner autumn is the critic's true moment in the sun: this is its natural home and time to shine. So listen up. The moment of transition from inner summer to inner autumn can be like hitting a speed bump. Things suddenly stop looking quite so sunny, your optimism sours a little, your energy flags and a tiny doubt or wobble creeps in.

It's as if your system is giving you a little judder to bring you back into presence, should it have wandered off. You've arrived at that part in the initiatory journey where you confront the 'monster': that is, face the shadow and get called to account for what you've been doing with your precious life force.

You can't afford to be unconscious at this crossover onto the critic's home turf. The critic is waiting for you. It has a missive to deliver from your deep self, asking you to check in, make sure you're in touch with and taking care of yourself, and on track with *your* Calling. And not doing anyone else's bidding.

'Suddenly it's time to face the music – no more hiding from myself, no more deluding myself or glossing over with optimism. I'm staring the hard, cold and intensely uncomfortable truth in the face.'

'A bit like looking down the barrel of a gun. Ughh, feeling sick to the stomach.'

SJANIE, DAY 24

If you've turned up empty-handed at the door of your inner autumn – that is, failed to get on with your ideas and plans and squandered your precious life force – you'll be more vulnerable to what can be the excoriating force of the critic.

But the more you hear the critic and make a choice to address the issues that emerge each month, the more you begin to respect this figure. And the more wisdom, self-respect and inner strength you can harness from your encounters with it.

The critic comes through more strongly now because of your increased permeability, and because it's your critic's time. While you're becoming more vulnerable and open, unlike in the inner spring, you're generally more weathered, less innocent. You've developed more psychological muscle and therefore more resilience...technically.

Some of you, of course, might want to dispute this. You're negotiating a dangerous combination of forces. These range from a deeply instinctual, wild, gutsy knowing, through to a capacity for fine sensing combined with increasing rawness of spirit. And on top of that, you're being asked to account for yourself with the critic.

This is your initiatory task at work. As you face your critic month after month with increased awareness and equanimity – holding the full complexity of feeling and energy – you'll be given the 'keys' to the Queendom of your holy sovereignty: the utter bliss of being you.

'The carpet of denial has been ripped out from under my feet and the raw, bare truth of how I feel is inescapable. The full force of feeling is here.'

SJANIE, DAY 25

Inner winter

Finally, you arrive at the last stage of your initiatory journey: menstruation. Just when you thought you couldn't take much more from the critic, things go quiet. The critic seems to slip away. Job done for this month.

This is a sure sign you've arrived at the first Chamber of Menstruation, Separation. The release and grounding, the protective bubble of menstruation, and the wash of love keep the critical energies at bay.

If you don't feel that easing, you could be more tired, raw and permeable than usual. Perhaps fighting the impulse to stop, or unable to let go. Even after the bleed you can sometimes get a backlash from the critic if you haven't been able to fully tank up at menstruation.

But the more you're able to give yourself permission to let go, the more you can feel the soothing balm of menstruation repairing the wounding. And the stronger you'll feel.

If your inner critic is particularly tough, it skews your ability to enter the healing forces of menstruation. This becomes doubly painful – not only do you fail to get the respite from its endless commentary, you also lose the extraordinary affirmation of your being in the third Chamber of Menstruation, Renewal, and the connection to your vision or Calling in the fourth.

The more you meet the critic in your inner autumn, the more it can run its course and leave you free to enter unencumbered into menstruation. When you get a good dose of menstruation's blessings, your being is primed to meet the critic next time round in its creative, life-evolving role.

RETURNING YOUR CRITIC TO ITS NATURAL HOME

Like all tyrants, the critic knows no boundaries; it believes it can pass comment on your life 24/7, *if allowed to*. This open season on you by your critic happens because there are either very flimsy or no internal boundaries: no self-containment.

Instead of enjoying the multiplicity of internal states of being and perspectives that menstrual cycle awareness (MCA) confers, your psychological ‘inner ecology’ is reduced to being permanently on, active, out there and engaged with others. In other words, you’re holding on to that ‘summer’ woman.

(When we speak of your psychological inner ecology, we’re referring to the natural order of your menstrual cycle – The Two Vias, The Inner Seasons and The Five Chambers. You restore that ecology through cycle awareness – see [Chapters 1](#) and [8](#).)

In overriding the other Inner Seasons you effectively create a mono-cultural state, within which there’s no ability to hold the inner critic to its rightful place; and therefore to its rightful life-serving role in your developmental journey.

As you work with your cycle you begin to awaken the wombing process (described in [Chapter 2](#)), and build your inner container. You discover that each phase of the cycle is integral to your full wellbeing and creative expression, and therefore that it’s important not to override them. As Desi described it, ‘Menstrual cycle awareness has given me structure.’

The Inner Seasons and their boundaries are re-established through your ability to live into each one, holding or pacing yourself with each season’s imperatives. You’ll also feel actual ‘demarcation lines’ as you move between one season and

the next; these are the crossover days between the seasons that we described in [Chapter 4](#).

Your capacity to be aware of your process, and hold the tension of the different currents of energy moving through you on a monthly basis, builds the capacity to restore the inner critic to its rightful season and role in your initiatory journey. It doesn't happen overnight, but with time and the grace of growing self-care through cycle awareness, this magic happens.

THE GREAT AWAKENER

Have you noticed how life seems to go along fairly OK and then suddenly, you hit the premenstruum and out of nowhere you doubt everything. You ask yourself the big existential questions: *What's my life about? Am I on track? Am I doing what I really want to be doing? Am I facing the things I should be facing? Is my relationship working? Or Why am I in this relationship?*

Or, alternatively, you hear blunt statements from yourself such as: *Your life is sh*t*; or worse, *I am sh*t*, and other derogatory remarks. The critic isn't usually interested in finessing things. Its sacred charge is to prick the bubble of your life, your naive self. It calls you on any illusions you're holding, and asks you to get smart about your life. It's awakening you.

Like the 13th fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, the critic spoils the perfect party and causes the princess (the innocent self) to prick her finger and 'die' (which, incidentally, is the symbol for menarche in the story itself). In other words, burst the bubble of her childlike self and begin her journey to adulthood.

The princess of the story falls asleep for 100 years, only to be awoken by the kiss of the handsome prince. You too can fall asleep to the deeper meaning of your life each time you fail to meet this critical provocation. But in our menstrual story of awakening, by choosing to meet and respond to the inner critic consciously, you *do* wake up. Could the critic just be the handsome prince in disguise?

**It's as though the critic has its metaphorical hand on the pulse of your
Calling, even when you don't know what the bejesus that is. It just knows
when you're off track.**

The critic can feel painful, even destructive, if its needs are not sufficiently met and contained. But if you can face it consciously, however small the gesture, it can be productive and energizing.

More than that, the critic is your passport to a mature and discerning life – to the truth of yourself and the courage to follow that truth even when the path looks fraught with challenges.

Cleaning up your act

In the process of awakening, the critic acts as the catalyst to help you refine your life, and drill down to the essence of who you are. Under the critic's aegis you clear out, cut back, edit and prune the metaphorical and literal deadwood of your life to get to that essence. It's a process that unfolds over your menstruating years and reaches its pinnacle during menopause.

The knack to pruning lies in not cutting back so severely that you cripple your capacity to regenerate. That's the danger. Remember, the critic is weak on boundaries: it doesn't know when to stop. As you meet it and say 'enough', you create a boundary. In that moment you experience the critic's gift to you: a claiming of your own knowing and authority.

The art lies in being able to really listen to what this figure says, and sort the wheat from the chaff, the relevant from the ridiculous. Some of the things the critic says can be quite mad. However, madness and the often dismissive and hurtful tone of delivery aside, the critic has valid things to say.

Can you meet the critic's tone while extracting and addressing its important message? There'll be times when you can do it, and come away thinking, *that was creative and useful*. And there'll be times when the critic wins hands down and you limp from the arena licking your wounds.

Sometimes the critic is so powerful, you can't even make it into the arena to face it off. This is all entirely normal. So do take heart: be kind to yourself and forgive your own failings.

The critic and your shadow side

The work of the critic and your shadow side go hand in hand. Conveniently, these are both amplified in the premenstruum. The shadow is, as the word implies, the part of you that lives in the shadows.

It usually means your less savoury characteristics: your avarice, meanness, smallness, shallowness, gullibility, pettiness, bitterness and so on – all that you condemn in others and yourself.

Equally, you can place in the shadow your ‘higher’ qualities – for example, the talents that you’re shy to express – particularly if they don’t get a lot of mainstream support. This includes powers that weren’t recognized, met and affirmed when you were younger.

Each menstrual month, as the energies of your cycle start to retreat in the premenstruum and you become more permeable, your underbelly, or shadow side, is exposed.

As you gradually learn to meet and accept these dispossessed parts of yourself, you provide less purchase for your critic to get its claws into you. Shadow work is an act of self-acceptance, the ultimate buffer against your critic.

As you get to know where you’re fallible, not very skilled or overly tender, and make a clear point with yourself that it’s OK (actually, it’s more than OK – you aren’t meant to be a genius at everything; we’re all talented in different ways, thank goodness), the more robust you become at meeting criticism and dealing with it cleanly.

The critic will, of course, continue to pick at those tender places, but you can

look it in the eye and say: *You're right, I'm not brilliant at — (fill in the gap). It's not my thing, and I'm OK with that. I now recognize that my strengths are — (fill in the gap), and I love that.*

This is one of the most empowering things you can do for yourself to ease the critic's haranguing. Ultimately, the critic is testing to see if anyone is 'home': in other words, how present you are. It can sense incongruities a mile off. For example, if you speak one thing while feeling another, the critic sneaks in.

How you deal with this figure is less about what you say to it and more about the fact of meeting it, the tone of your response, and how well you believe in yourself (or not).

LEARNING TO PICK UP THE GAUNTLET

It's as though the critic is throwing down the gauntlet to you each month. Your task is to pick it up and meet it. Amber's story reveals all. It was day 24 of her cycle and she was feeling overly domesticated and so trapped in her role as a mother – a prime vulnerable moment for her critic to enter.

As she stood in front of the calendar, checking the home-schooling plans for the day ahead, she felt her critic arrive. Here's how she describes the experience:

'Her entrance is crystal clear. In my imagination it's as if my critic has just stepped out of the shadows into the light of a street lamp. She's got proper street cred today. I swear she's taken a drag on a cigarette before flicking it back into the shadows.'

'She looks me straight in the eye and says: "Still haven't worked this one out for yourself, have you?" It's a challenge rather than a question, and her voice is low and gruff. She's a tough old bird. The gauntlet is down...ding ding, round 1.'

Through working with her cycle over a number of years, Amber has now learnt to pick up the gauntlet. This means pacing herself well throughout the whole cycle, including giving herself as much downtime as she can at menstruation. And, most importantly, acting on the points her critic has called her on during the previous month. She says:

'I'm learning that caring for my cyclic self in this way seems to create a much "cleaner" container for me to meet the critic. Her arrival acts more as a catalyst towards fulfilling my Calling, rather than a slaughter that kills me off.'

Amber also shared with us a crucial point that if she's sloppy about her self-care boundaries, which happens more often than she'd like, her critic runs rampant, turning up in all seasons. It happens without her even being aware of it, and it's usually not until she's exploded with anger or overloaded on sugar (a great dampener of feelings and a sure sign of the critic's arrival) that she's realized the critic is doing a number on her.

On this particular day, however, Amber was ready with the following response:

'Well, actually, Critic, I've been thinking about what you called me on last month, and you're right – this whole home educating arrangement isn't really working out very well for me. I'm yearning to create space for my own work.'

'I'm not quite sure exactly how that's going to play out, but I have some sense of what I need to do, so I'm following those threads. In the meantime, I'm trying to arrange more support for myself. I've let my partner know how I feel and he's on board, and I've contacted a babysitter. I'm pretty happy I've done all I can do, for now.'

Amber felt pleased with herself and very relieved that she'd paid attention to her critic's previous premenstrual attack. But she could hear no accolades coming from it. This is a classic occurrence – don't hang about waiting for praise from your critic, because that's not its remit.

It pays to have a sense of humour, as Amber does – especially when she then realized, on looking at the calendar again, that her partner would be working through the whole of her next bleed. There would be no proper time off from parenting for her.

She felt doomed and could almost feel the delight of her critic as it said, *'How are you gonna deal with that one then?'* Amber's usual reaction would have been to crumble, but instead, she burst out laughing, and in that moment felt such an overwhelming sense of love for her critic. She says:

'I get what my critic's doing. She's just handed me the ultimate golden nugget. What am I going to do about nobody caring for that side of my cycle?

'She and I know exactly what I'll do: take it into my bleed and dream into a new way with it. I knew her in that moment, as I've never known her before...in her sacred role of evolving me into my Calling. And I love her for it.'

Yes, folks, it is possible – perhaps only momentarily – to love, or at least develop a grudging appreciation for, your inner critic.

Amber is a natural visionary and often gets very powerful messages and direction when she bleeds. Through her critic's provocations she's learning to take her own side, and recognize the power she holds in herself and use it. It's an ongoing practice but it's becoming more doable.

Things can and do change as you stay the course. There's positive proof of this in Amber's case. A few months on, she's moved house and the children are in full-time education in a school they all love.

DEALING WITH A CRITIC INVASION

The critic is opportunistic – you do have to admire its style and unremitting determination. Its job is to criticize and it's going to look for any vulnerable moment to sneak in.

If you're tired, a bit run-down, unhappy, unconnected to yourself, in transition – such as the crossover days of the cycle (see [Chapter 4](#)), or a life transition in which you've divested yourself of one identity and are stepping into a new one: for example, becoming a new mother or negotiating your way from being in a relationship to being single (or vice versa) – you can be more permeable to the critic's wiles.

Getting to know your Inner Seasons, through the practice of MCA, naturally begins to create boundaries to contain the critic and hold it to its sacred role.

When your critic turns up in a season other than its natural home of the inner autumn (the premenstruum), simplistic though this may sound, you're going to ask it to leave. Explain that, while you appreciate it might have important things to say, this is not the moment. It will have its time in the rightful order of things.

You can say something like: 'Critic, this is not where you belong, so please leave. I need you, but only in your rightful place of the inner autumn. When I arrive there, you can say what you need to and I will listen.'

We find it's necessary to speak these words out loud. Even if it feels futile – as though you're spitting into the wind – speak anyway. And keep doing it.

If you're committed to menstrual cycle awareness, and therefore to yourself, this practice can be surprisingly effective over time. The critic doesn't give up easily (or possibly ever), so you do need to keep at it. Develop your own playful strategies for returning the critic to the box of its appropriate season.

One woman created a literal box and when her critic was in full swing, and she could summon enough awareness, she'd write its name on a piece of paper and put it in the box. You could perhaps also use a stone to symbolize the critic – to give the ritual more substance. In time, you'll find what works best for you.

GUIDELINES FOR HANDLING YOUR CRITIC

The following life-saving guidelines are what we've found helpful in our process of wrestling our critics to the ground to extract the gold nugget.

1. **Practise menstrual cycle awareness (MCA).** Begin to honour the pace of each Inner Season – your first act of boundary setting.
2. **Know your vulnerabilities and vulnerable times.** Get to know your critic's modus operandi. Discover when it's most likely to turn up – the conditions and situations (both inner and outer) – and be kind with yourself around that time. Know your Achilles heel moments in the cycle, and don't overexpose yourself then. In other words, protect your tender times.
3. **Take care of your overall health.** Make sure you get enough sleep, and don't let your blood sugar levels dip too low. Both of these can make you more emotionally vulnerable and therefore open to the critic's attack.
4. **Slow the pace.** Go more slowly, especially as you enter the premenstruum: the critic can easily invade when you're rushing.
5. **Name the critic whenever you feel its presence.** It helps to get to know your signals that the critic has been activated. Pause and name it. Allow yourself to feel whatever turbulent energies are swirling through you, without doing anything.

6. **Listen.** Continue to breathe, listen, feel and be aware that you're experiencing a critic attack. What is your critic actually saying? Grab a sheet of paper and write down what you hear. Some of it may be hard, unfair and toxic, but writing can be a means of creating some detachment from it so you can actually examine the detail and possibly find a gem of truth among the dross.
7. **Take one issue and ask for clarification.** Get the detail. What exactly does the critic mean when it says, for example, *You're an idiot* or *Your life's going nowhere*? What is it that you're doing, or failing to do, that makes the critic say that? Of course you're not an idiot, but that's the kind of extreme language the critic uses to state that something you've done isn't quite as good as it could be.
8. **Respond to the points.** Is there anything you can agree on? There's usually 5 per cent truth hidden in the onslaught. Find it and agree.
9. **Take your own side.** Name what you're doing and getting right, and what you disagree with. Separate *who you are* (your very being) from *what you do*. Your being is whole and perfect, but what you do can be flawed sometimes. The critic speaks in such a way that it feels as if it's saying *who you are* is all wrong. That is never, ever true. However, if you've faffed around and not faced up to some things, you can agree with the critic on that point.
10. **Continue back and forth with this process.** If the unpleasant feelings don't ease up, assume that the critic hasn't 'heard' what you've said when you *did* agree with it. Go back to that. Continue back and forth with steps 6 to 9. Sometimes you just have to agree to disagree. Even then, it can feel as if the critic has still 'won'. But just bringing to light how unrelentingly hard the critic can be helps you. Sometimes resolution doesn't feel possible at all, but the act of trying to respond can still shift things for the better. You'll go away feeling different.

11. **Use humour.** A great antidote to the critic's demands, which sometimes are quite mad, is to use humour: *Yeah, right, I'm supposed to be a 24/7 superwoman who doesn't have needs, and definitely shouldn't be wasting her precious time sleeping, blah, blah, blah...* Frankly, a good laugh and a lie-down are the best response.
12. **Be clear about your goals, direction and choices.** The more you open to the wisdom of your cycle, the stronger your clarity, direction and life choices will be, and this too is a great antidote to the critic.
13. **Comparisons are odious.** Celebrate others and yourself but drop the comparisons.
14. **Know thyself and recognize limits.** Don't try to be all things to all people. Know what you're good at and not good at, and accept that. Remember, there are some things you'll never be great at. That's not a crime – it's a form of boundary setting in itself.
15. **Get help.** We want to reiterate that some women may be so identified with their inner critic that it feels like who they are. In this case, applying our suggestions may feel difficult or even impossible. If that's you, we strongly recommend you seek professional support alongside your menstrual cycle awareness practice.

Alexandra remembers a very painful encounter with her own critic some years ago, after an interview for a documentary. She tried to walk off the attack but it was like being pursued by a flock of angry birds pecking at her. Finally, she came to a halt on a bench looking out over the ocean and said, 'OK, Critic, what's the problem?' and out came a litany of failings.

As Alexandra probed further, what emerged was that her critic expected her to be absolutely brilliant in the interview when, in fact, it had been one of her first forays into a more public role as she was still in the early stages of her work.

She burst out laughing with relief – goodness knows what the joggers thought as they passed her on that bench. She knew there was much more to learn and was able to love the beginner in herself. The moment she did that, all the tension fell away, the sweetness returned and she could then enjoy her walk.

The critic in a nutshell

The critic's overall role in your initiatory journey is to bring you home to yourself; to urge you to meet life in all its fullness, so you may fulfil your Wild Power. Restore your inner ecology and the critic is restored to its natural home in the cycle – the inner autumn. It does take a little time and your willingness to follow the discipline of the cycle process.

It's also crucial to have allies. Initially, no one should have to go it alone with the critic, but we believe with time you can learn to meet it and extract its gifts. We need to add that dealing with your critic is never going to be a quiet walk in the park. After all, its task is to criticize. How you learn to meet this inner voice, and deal with its provocations, is key to your psychological and spiritual maturity.

As we said earlier, don't hold your breath hoping for praise – the critic's remit is nothing less than your awakening. As you forge a more engaged relationship with the critic, you pave the way for deeper intimacy and the possibility of a profound experience of Union. In the next chapter we reveal the critic's most sacred role – as gatekeeper of this Union: the Holy Grail for women.



Chapter 7

The Holy Grail

So far, we've described the critic's role in helping you to face yourself and build a strong inner capacity to be present, feel, and hold the complexity of you – the light and the dark, the complex and the naive. And in so doing, grow up.

Taking this approach to the critic is ultimately a deep act of reverence for yourself. To meet the critic ever more clearly and cleanly allows you to enter the most exquisite states of being at menstruation. Particularly at the first Chamber of Menstruation, Separation – see [Chapter 5](#).

Separation is the most ineffable place in the whole cycle. We call it the Holy Grail.

Through the ages, the Holy Grail has been concretized as a cup or bowl with extraordinary powers. Humanity's search for the Grail is a symbolic way of speaking of the psyche's longing for the return of the Feminine. It's a yearning to shift from an experience of being an onlooker of life to a deep sense of belonging and intimacy within this whole living, breathing, presence called Life, and a recognition that all is holy.

This gives us meaning and place, a holding within the cosmos. We become vessels through which the soul of the world can speak, asking us to unfold and evolve for the sake of us all. 'Drinking' from the Grail is the experience of exquisite, intimate and loving union.

If the 'cup' is anything, it's the pelvis, the womb. Or better still, the container of

our menstrual cycle process: the alchemical vessel in which we forge our capacity to enter this place of Union.

GUARDIAN OF THE GRAIL

Your inner critic stands guard at the metaphorical doorway to this place, for no one must pass unconsciously over the threshold. It's for this that the critic throws down the gauntlet each menstrual month.

- Can you pick up the gauntlet?
- Can you listen to your critic?
- Can you see past the garbage thrown at you by the critic to the gold nestling at its centre?
- Can you respond, rather than react to your critic?
- Can you begin to make tiny shifts in your life to honour the nugget of truth in the criticism?

Simply meeting this figure, and not collapsing, is picking up the gauntlet. Anointing your vulnerabilities as openings to the untamed, complicated messiness of being fully human is picking up the gauntlet. As you feel the ground shift under you – your sure sense of self slipping away – and continue to remain present, you pick up the gauntlet.

As the wash of emptiness and abandonment claims you, and you don't collapse or react, you pick up the gauntlet. As you feel completely overexposed and choose to remain undefended, so you say to that inner critical force, *I am here, I am ready*. And the keys to the holy space are handed to you.

The critic is the harbinger of the Holy Grail. As you meet its challenge each month with awareness, you craft the psychological vessel that allows you to channel the Feminine and open to the divine forces of menstruation.

In the Chamber of Separation you're at your most exposed to the spiritual dimension. Arriving there with increased levels of presence allows something holy to come towards you. You'll recognize it when it happens. You might feel full of wonder and awe, held in the presence of the ineffable; and as though you're 'in love' – although there's no flesh- and-blood object of your affections.

It's exquisite, delicate and beyond words. With words comes concretization: the heavy hand of literalism that will take you away from the immediacy of your own experience. Everything rests on your tender, raw, still presence.

And then your own singular version of what we're indicating will find you. It may take time to discover this moment of Union – months of living and loving your menstrual cycle process. It can't be rushed or forced.

There are no 'ten steps to Union', although if you keep a fidelity to the cycle's process you may find yourself there. We cannot say more. We ourselves grope our way in the metaphorical dark as we describe it to you.

HONOURING THE RAGE

At the core of our premenstrual tension and rage lies an indignation of our soul that this profound experience is not recognized and honoured each month. Our rage sources out of a deep place of existential loneliness, as though something isn't being used and is being lost to us all each month.

Alice has struggled a lot with premenstrual tension and menstrual pain, although these have diminished considerably since she's worked consciously with her cycle. Dropping deeply into her tension in a one-to-one session with Alexandra, something broke open and she simply said, as though it were the Goddess herself speaking through her, 'I want to be seen and met.'

At this point Alice didn't know about our specific teachings on the Holy Grail, but there it was: the indignation that this sacred power is not recognized. An archetypal longing that we suspect echoes in women everywhere. You'll find more about it, and its link to menstrual suffering, in the section called 'menstrual trauma' in [Chapter 8](#).

'I have a strange pattern playing out at the moment in which I'm overcome with an obsessive urgency to be seen, just before and into the beginning of my bleed.'

'Last month I found myself rushing to update my yoga website (with no apparent reason for the urgency), and this month it was a new creative project that's been quite literally pushed out into the public arena.'

PENNY

Alexandra remembers one young woman who, 18 months after attending one of her workshops, wrote excitedly to say that she'd found that sweet spot. When

she attended the workshop she'd only just come off the pill after reading Alexandra's co-authored book *The Pill: are you sure it's for you?* It can take some time to recover the actual cycle after hormonal contraception, and also to restore the deep soul forces.

If you're finding this Grail moment elusive, let go of searching and simply enjoy the overall pleasure of restoring the wisdom of the whole cycle. The Grail will find you in its own right timing. It also rests on the luxury of time and space to follow the orchestrations of your being. Simply knowing about the Grail moment is a first step.

Knowledge can act as a kind of balm to your soul that at least something has been recognized. We would, however, strongly recommend you give yourself the occasional Big Bleed (see [Chapter 5](#)) – that is, plan ahead to give yourself time to let go deeply at menstruation, without any commitments.

ENTERING THE GRAIL WITH YOUR PARTNER

Your partner – your very real flesh-and-blood beloved – can join you in this experience if they too know how to respect the overall cycle, and in particular, pace and honour the shifting energies of the dying days of it.

Just as the cycle acts as a container to manage and evolve your life, so it can be that for your relationship.

The more a relationship rides the cycle process, the more likely both parties will be ready to enter into menstruation prepared. Working with your cycle in a relationship helps you to stay more in sync – in subtle communication with each other – and brings your energies into greater harmony.

This can grow in quiet, simple ways. For example, Desi's husband suggested they organize the New Year's family calendar around her cycle. 'Oh, yeah!' cried Desi. She had only been attending to her cycle for about six months and yet the improvements in her own life and in those of the people around her were marked. Her husband 'got' it without any pressure from her. Perfect.

And then there's Subpreet, who shared the following: 'I'm assisting my husband as he relocates his dental practice, and I'm managing the team meetings and architect appointments all around my cycle. It's great: even my husband checks in with me first, and it's wonderful to move at the pace of my being.'

Respecting the cycle

Both of these are lovely examples of cycle work seeping quietly into relationship life. This is important as some partners can fight it, especially if it's imposed on them. Which is understandable. The cycle can feel like a disturbing third party in a relationship – just as the cycle interrupts your own wonderfully wilful egoic agenda, so it can do that to your partner. And no one loves having their plans thwarted.

In these two examples the actions of the partners, in this case men, speak volumes to their potential readiness to go deeper when the time shows itself. It's as if they've passed the first test...albeit unwittingly.

As the partner accepts the reality of the cycle, and even appreciates it, it can bring the same benefits of soothing intimacy and understanding to the relationship as it does to your experience of yourself.

Breeda discovered this for herself. She and her husband Mark have been doing this for some years now, and while at first Mark struggled to appreciate it, over time he began to discover his own power and role within it.

He's developed a huge respect for the process, saying, 'It's such an obvious, powerful thing that I'd be mad to try to go against it. It's something working me, too.' It helps him understand Breeda more, and know when to be near and when to give her space. It's brought an overall structure and rhythm to their relationship. There's more harmony and much less fighting.

Amusingly, Mark says it feels like being a farmer. 'Why plant in winter?' he says. In other words, why go on a weekend away when it's Breeda's inner winter?

‘It’s like fighting nature – a drag. Following the course of nature is easier. The cycle is such a big force.’ Because Mark respects the cycle, he has an increased capacity to meet Breedá – subtly signalling his readiness to her deep self.

‘Feeling so transparent, like the physical feels much too earthy. My partner and I have never physically made love at this time but I’m curious as to what that would be like.’

KAREN, DAY 28

Meeting criticism

With respect for the cycle comes the next Holy Grail challenge for the partner: how to meet the great feedback moment of the premenstruum. In other words, how to meet that inner critic.

Have you noticed how you can get much more picky and critical of your beloved in the premenstruum? Certainly many men are very conscious of the premenstrual strife; some even keep track of their partner's cycle as a self-preservation strategy so they are prepared for the premenstrual 'troubles' – often ducking and weaving to avoid the onslaught. But when the criticisms are not taken seriously, it can diminish a woman's soul *and* up her rage.

Of course it's hard to meet this criticism if the woman is unconscious of it, or not yet congruent with it, herself. But consider this: behind that indignation is a yearning for the relationship to be nourished by this great channel of connection to the Divine. Perhaps both of you can hold that possibility?

Just as the inner critic throws down the gauntlet to you personally each month, when you start to get critical of your partner before bleeding, you're testing his ability to be present and ready for deep intimacy. Meeting the critic is an initiatory task for the relationship. You both need to know how to handle it, although the woman is the conduit for the challenge.

On the surface your criticisms can be over very mundane issues – clothes left on the floor, washing-up not done, garbage not put out – or deeper issues within the relationship. It doesn't matter what. Ultimately, your deep self probes to see if your partner is sufficiently 'home' to themselves to face and pick up the gauntlet: to meet you in your power and take you seriously.

You're not consciously thinking, *I want to test how awake my partner is*. On the

contrary, you may find, almost out of nowhere, you're suddenly really pissed off with something. If you're not sufficiently awake to this critical force, it can be destructive.

But, if you are, you can learn to feel, catch and ask yourself, *What am I really searching for here?* The answer won't be, *Are you ready for the Grail?* However, it will be something significant and important for the relationship.

When Adele stepped into a relationship with a woman for the first time, three years ago, not only did she have the means to understand herself through cycle awareness, she could also gain insights into her partner, Elitsa – especially in difficult moments when the critic is at large.

As Adele has discovered, 'menstrual awareness is incredible'. She says: 'Because I know and understand it for myself, I'm able to translate some of the critical energy that comes at me from Elitsa.' If Adele is sufficiently present when her partner is critical, she listens:

'This is extraordinarily powerful because – as I dodge the flying plates – I can hear my partner's real fears and worries that, for whatever reason, she feels I haven't heard from her this month. What gold. It enables me to take the tone and delivery less personally as well.'

'I attempt to practise the same acceptance as I do with my own inner critic. I let my partner "get away" with speaking to me in not the best of ways, as at this time I know that's irrelevant. After she's bled I can bring it up safely: "I appreciate you needed to tell me... but the way you said it to me was like this... that was awful to receive. Was it what you meant? Is there another way you can communicate it to me now?'

This mutual understanding, deep-level communication and common experience strengthens Adele and Elitsa's relationship no end. Adele has found that purposefully listening to Elitsa, particularly premenstrually, has helped them make decisions about moving home and other big changes. As they hold as best they can to this discipline of awareness, they're creating firmer ground for

deeper intimacy, and dare we say it, that glorious Holy Union.

Provocation during the premenstruum, although challenging and possibly painful, could be awakening for you and your partner.

If both parties know about this holy moment they can learn to transform this provocative, disturbing time into the most exquisite intimacy together. It does take time and emotional courage: after all, it's high spiritual practice.

Mark is human: he does get triggered by that critic. 'You can't "handle" the critic,' he says. 'It feels like it's a trap.' It's as if he can't win with it. He can go unconscious and play victim, and then blame Breeda, but when he's not in reaction he knows full well how to disarm her critic with kindness – heaps of it. He also needs a break and recognizes the importance of Breeda having a good bleed and a rest from the world. This gives him a break from the critic in order to stand his ground, and meet the critic with kindness in the autumn. He's begun to sense the deeper level. For him, the critic has 'an arrow-like contribution: a clear-seeing potency aimed at me and the world'.

Mark also recognizes he has that direct power in himself, which is clearly allowing him to meet Breeda more cleanly and lovingly. He really respects the power of the menstrual cycle: 'There's a Mystery, a deepening, that you don't ever get to understand fully but just experience a whisper of,' he says. 'I trust it – it's very powerful. And if a man doesn't want to be with a powerful woman he should get out now.'

Breeda and Mark have both now felt the very real tenderizing, delicate energy in that first Chamber of Menstruation. Breeda says: 'It's like we're both permeable at this point, not just me; and I find the idea of "leaving" him to bleed difficult.

'I feel merged without physically making love. It's soft and ultra fine and love-filled. It's inclusive and very distinct from earlier in the premenstruum, or the early part of Separation, which for me can begin 48 hours before bleeding.'

Take her seriously

To the partner of the provocative premenstrual woman, we simply want to say, ‘Meet her – meet your beloved.’ You don’t have to agree with the accusation or criticism, or put up with a comment that shames or diminishes you. That’s not on.

But do take seriously the *fact* of the criticism. It’s the quality of your response – how willing you are to meet her and address the issue cleanly – that can clear the channels between you. It can possibly clean up unaddressed issues and most importantly signal to her deep self that you’re present, capable of holding and caring for yourself in an undefended manner. And thus ready to enter the Void with her.

If you can both dare to be vulnerable and present, you may find the door to the Grail is flung open. And you could just feel the presence of Love fill you.

The critic’s role is to clear the way, but if the way is already clear entering the Holy Grail together can happen spontaneously. Alexandra was once giving a talk on menstruation at a large event in Madrid, Spain. Afterwards a couple came up to her, eyes shining, and told her excitedly how they had already discovered this place each month by chance and how amazing it was.

It can just happen, such is the wonder and ineffability of the Chamber of Separation, *and* our challenge in trying to describe how you access it. The key, as with most of this menstrual power stuff, is going slowly. If you can hang out in a nice cruisey space with your partner – without an agenda, not demanding anything from each other and comfortable in your own skins – you might just find that this sacred space emerges.

We want to emphasize that it ‘might’. It’s not a given. Should it elude you, just

let it be – after all, there are already so many amazing gifts to menstruation. And not all partners are necessarily interested. We've known men who recognize menstruation as powerful and respect it, but also find it unsettling and would much rather their partners could just go off on their own to bleed.

We've also known men who are simply not interested in cyclical life, and no matter how obsessed you are, they're not coming on board. So don't pressure yourself or your partner to find this sweet spot. Simply follow and honour the experience you have and enjoy what unfolds.

Practice: your partner's guidelines to the Holy Grail

1. Get to know the woman's cycle.
2. Honour the cycle's rhythm.
3. Use the rhythm as a container/organizer for the relationship (i.e. live in sync with it).
4. Respect the premenstrual critic and meet it (rather than react, just listen: you don't have to agree with it).
5. Slow down together as she comes into menstruation.
6. Trust the emptiness – don't fill the space or distract yourself – and stay present to the unknown.



Chapter 8

Menstrual Cycle Awareness (MCA)

Thus far we've been on an extraordinary journey into the heart of menstruality, and unveiled the Holy of Holies lying at the core of your being. But it's one thing to read our ecstatic espousal of menstrual power and another to actually experience it.

We hope it's clear by now that menstrual cycle awareness is the means by which you activate the complete journey of your initiatory process, embody the intelligence of the three inner maps, and realize your Wild Power.

This chapter formally reinstates menstrual cycle awareness as a women's spiritual practice. Here, we describe a more advanced version of the MCA practice you learnt in [Chapter 1](#). It offers a richer exposition of its nuances that will help you experience the fullness of this spiritual practice and allow it to work its magic on you.

We then explore what you can do if you don't have a cycle because of health problems, or are in perimenopause, menopause or postmenopause, and would like to reap the benefits or recover some of this knowledge.

We make sense of the hurdles on your spiritual path when we address menstrual problems, and consider how these cyclical interruptions, disturbances and symptoms are potential gateways to your power. Finally, we share the psycho-spiritual foundations for healing.

MCA: OUR ORIGINAL SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Just as we meditate or do yoga, MCA is also a profound practice for building spiritual life. MCA is a woman's spiritual practice, an inner discipline of high order.

MCA is unique among spiritual practices in that it's built into our bodies. We don't control it; instead, it has its own timing within us and comes with a fully integrated ego-deflation device – aka the premenstruum.

As we've said before, when knowledge of this inner practice goes unnamed, something immeasurable is lost both to women and the world.

'This [menstruality] information is the kind of enlightenment that a woman should be born with. This is the kind of enlightenment that changes lives.'

HARRI

This feminine spiritual practice doesn't have to work against other spiritual traditions that you may already be drawn to or are already practising, such as Buddhism, Paganism, Christianity or Hinduism. Rather, MCA can serve or deepen your understanding of those paths.

All practices or disciplines are of course great, and vitally useful in their own right. You may indeed be drawn to specific ones, as we are. Some of our favourites are Movement Medicine, womb yoga, Shintaido, ritual, ceremony and prayer.

Most of us are taught to rely too heavily on the mind and not enough on the body

and felt sense. When you combine a mind-dominant culture with one that has denied menstruality power, you've a major challenge on your hands.

This is where these spiritual practices really come into their own for us as women. They help us to become more embodied and learn to trust the intelligence of the body as equal to the intelligence of the mind. They build a discipline of awareness that helps us to meet, manage and hold our menstruality energies.

We think of these other practices as disciplines one has to actively *choose to do*, whereas the menstrual cycle *happens to us* as an ongoing process, regardless.

These other practices can't truly replace what occurs for a woman when she comes into intimate relationship with her menstrual rhythm. All other practices for a woman are ultimately derivative; in fact, they potentially lock us out of the extraordinary sweet spot at the heart of the cycle.

The menstrual cycle is the original practice for a woman, our innate yoga. What is heartening to see today is a growing number of yoga practitioners awaken to this information and integrate it into their teaching.

We think this creates the best of both worlds for women. In particular, we're both in love with the womb yoga of Uma Dinsmore Tuli – author of *Yoni Shakti: A woman's guide to power and freedom through yoga and tantra* – who has completed our training.

Over years she has developed an exquisite body of truly radical feminist and feminine yoga that, in our experience, leaves you feeling deeply seen and recognized in your wholeness as a woman. We always leave her yoga sessions feeling so well and integrated, resting in the most delicious intimacy with ourselves and the Beloved.

MCA: THE FULL BOX AND DICE

We think of MCA as a four-part process:

1. **Chart your cycle** – the power of presence.
2. **Sync your cycle** and your day-to-day schedule (as much as humanly possible) – the power of agency.
3. **Cooperate with the energies** of the cycle day – the power of encounter.
4. **Bring the power of your cycle to your situation** – the art of your menstruality.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

1. Chart your cycle

Mindful attention is your first step in the initiatory journey, bringing the power of presence to bear on your cycle. Menstrual cycle awareness is just as it sounds: the act of noticing and noting where you are in your cycle at any one time; in other words, knowing what day you're on. Please refer to [Chapter 1](#) for the basic instructions on how to chart your cycle.

As you chart, bear in mind the map of The Inner Seasons and the crossover days. What season do you feel you're in on any given day? Can you begin to catch the transition moments from one season to another?

With time, you'll notice a pattern unfold as your Inner Seasons come alive in your experience. We call this your unique rhythm of power. As you get to know your rhythm of power you can begin to apply what you've learnt about the inner critic and restore it to its natural home (the inner autumn). Most crucially, you'll notice when it turns up in an inappropriate season and can send it packing.

We've also created online a Menstrual Cycle Literacy course (redschooolonline.net), which takes you step by step through the process of cycle awareness, along with reflective exercises and teachings. It includes a comprehensive journal and a month-at-a-glance chart.

The benefit of having a month-at-a-glance chart is that you see the pattern in your mood and energy over time more easily. The downside is you usually can't record a lot on it, so it's also a great idea to have a journal of some kind running alongside it, particularly for recording dreams.

Observing the pattern of your dreams through your cycle helps you to develop even greater acuity towards yourself, your needs and the cycle. It also announces those change-of-gear moments between seasons that can so often trip us up. If

you're curious to understand the significance of the crossovers for your initiatory journey, reread the section on them in [Chapter 4](#).

Charting the cycle is a process that evolves over time, and you'll hone the best means of recording it for you.

Attention to your cycle on a day-to-day basis builds your quality of presence and this is the key of keys for awakening the full power of your cycle.

'Until recently I charted my cycle separately to other things, buying specific diaries expressly for the purpose. Now, without giving the matter much thought, I've amalgamated the general day-to-day with the hormonal day-to-day. And it struck me that this might be significant.

'No more compartmentalizing, perhaps; no more separating out? It would be wonderful to think that, after five years of diligent menstrual cycle awareness, something subtle and unifying has occurred, shaping me into a more cohesive Whole.

'Without my quite realizing it. And it's instructive for me to remember that things take as long as they take to change – for five years is a good wedge of time.'

PENNY

2. Sync your cycle

As you get to know your own unique rhythm of power, we recommend you organize your diary around it. Over time you'll learn more about your needs and tendencies in each phase, and the powers that you naturally tap into, so you can plan events to suit your cycle.

For example, arrange social events at the time when you feel most outgoing and interested in being with others. Or schedule business meetings at the time when your powers of critical insight are at their sharpest.

'I always took day 2 and 3 off work. I worked for myself so it wasn't a problem. I made no plans and spent both days nurturing myself.'

'I still carried out mummy and wife duties, but in the proximity of my house, and I only travelled if something was really needed, like milk. I was gentle and kind to my body. Doing this stopped all my cramps – previously I'd lived the full week on painkillers.'

KIRSTY

Planning your schedule to suit your cycle is an imperfect art because your cycle may not go to plan. Some of you have irregular cycles as the default and so it'll be hard to do this. For those of you who do have some regularity, work to that rhythm. Have a sense of where you'll be in your cycle as you book something into your schedule. Particularly watch out for superwoman around ovulation. She reckons you can do it all regardless, and is blissfully unaware of what lies ahead.

Dhanya had her exams about a month after her period and planned her revision to be in the spring part of the cycle. 'I rested at home during my period, and used the time to reflect,' she says.

‘Then in the spring I went full swing ahead for my exam preparation and ended up doing way better in my exams than I did in the previous semester. Hahaha! Basically, the trick was to completely surrender during my period – because I didn’t do that previously – and I arose from it feeling super-recharged and motivated.’

Dhanya’s words say it all. There are also those times when your cycle keeps you on your toes, throwing you a curveball as your period arrives when it’s ‘not supposed to’.

Lisa D was feeling very pleased with herself. She had planned her whole month around her cycle – trips booked, workshops organized and so on – and then, ‘on the evening of day 21, day 1 arrived!’

She said to herself, What’s going on? I didn’t ovulate late. I know exactly when I ovulated, on day 16. So how can my period arrive so early? I’m 28 and have always had a regular cycle.

Lisa D then remembered the project she’d been working on: a proposal for an arts grant in Dublin, Ireland. She’d spent all her spring and summer energy writing it and in the early autumn she called on her inner editor to clean it up.

‘It was a big job on my manuscript, which is still a vulnerable little thing really,’ she says. ‘My bleed arrived just seconds after I’d submitted the proposal online. It had been a really big ordeal for me to get through. Big release. Could that be it?’

‘I’ve adopted this mantra: “I feel more at home in the unpredictable flow than in the stagnant trance of certainty.”’

SJANIE, DAY 38?!

3. Cooperate with the energies of the cycle day

In an ideal world we'd be firmly in charge of our own schedule – our cycle beating out a nice, friendly, cooperative, regular rhythm that allows us to sync everything easily. However, until that day arrives we're going to have to dance with the Unknown and work with who we are in any given moment.

This discipline of cycle awareness, a quiet and ongoing inner practice, happens under the radar of all your everyday activities and acts as a gesture of connection to the ineffable. Even though you and your actual day may feel anything *but* ineffable – in fact, it may be rather mundane, busy or even stressed.

We often have such high expectations of ourselves. We believe we should be on the ball all the time – like an elite athlete at the peak of her game – and anything less than that feels just not good enough. It's true that some of the cycle's energies can be plain inconvenient in our highly focused and driven 24/7 culture. And so your next step in this practice is to give credence to and deeply respect the feelings and energy of any particular day of your cycle.

And, regardless of what you have to do, work with that energy *as best you can*. Remember, just 1 per cent of cooperation is all it takes. And remember, too, that Big Red Rule: rather than living the cycle you think you should have, pay attention to the one you've got.

Ultimately, it's about going with the energy and mood of your cycle for that day. For example, if your energy is low and you feel more vulnerable and want to be quiet, don't push yourself. Move more gently and slowly, and be less social.

Because you don't have an abundance of energy and drive, this apparent 'reigning in' or 'limitation' gives way to an expansion in other capacities – most commonly, your intuition, instinct, 'night vision' and critical faculties. You may

find that your sensitivity makes you more aware of detail, or opens you to the wonder of life. As one door to power closes another opens. On another day you might be full of energy and could conquer the world. Go for it!

You'll find simply cooperating with yourself, rather than bullying yourself to be something you're not, can make you so much more creative, effective and efficient.

'Gliding and expanding. All within the crazy constraints of mothering two small and superbly demanding daughters.'

SJANIE, DAY 13

There are, of course, many energies to the cycle that are easy to love and respect. For example, that feeling of optimism and new life as you emerge from menstruation; the love and generosity we have for the world around ovulation, when nothing is too much trouble; the insight and clarity, or take-no-prisoners and take-no-bullsh*t of the premenstruum (we love this one) – if you know how to handle it congruently.

On the other hand, there are some rather challenging energies to take on where we feel vulnerable, slow, dreamy, impatient, difficult or critical. But to tweak one of Scottish comedian Billy Connolly's lines – 'There's no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes' – we'd say, 'There's no such thing as bad powers in the menstrual cycle, only lack of appreciation and support for those powers.'

Even as you're supposed to be something on the outside, on the inside you can acknowledge the reality of who you are and keep a tender sweetness towards that. Now *that's* power.

4. Bring the power of your cycle to your situation

We're going to step cycle awareness up another gear now, but don't push yourself to do this until you're ready.

In this next stage of MCA practice we want to invite you to truly trust the powers of the cycle, even when they don't feel good or apparently 'look right'. Ordain the power as holy intelligence, and anoint who you are in that moment as right.

Whatever the situation, have the courage to bring in the intelligence of the cycle. Operate unashamedly from the fullness of your experience, rather than simply coping with it.

What we call the 'art of menstruality' (working with the tension between where you are in your cycle and your life circumstances) requires complete trust in the integrity of the cycle. For example, you're menstruating and have to front up at a business meeting. Prepare yourself well – you don't want to be rushed – and then lean into and trust the perfection of where you are in the cycle.

Use the depth and charge of menstruation in the meeting; in so doing, you'll bring a deep authority and stillness that can be riveting (and you don't need to share that you're menstruating).

Or, you're just coming into that vulnerable moment before you bleed. You might feel really distant and dreamy, yearn for space and not want to do stuff, like going to work. But, again, there's a way to bring this power to the situation.

Alexandra remembers her very singular experience of that day when she was working as a psychotherapist. Ordinarily she would've preferred the entire day

to herself, as she could feel intensely vulnerable and see-through, dreamy and still.

But she respected these powers, and so could inwardly cooperate with them – staying congruent with the delicious, raw, tender stillness – and in so doing discover a very detached, dispassionate, discerning place of great clarity. Although she could come across as tough, she used this power in her practice to deliver ‘tough love’. An offering that was a positive catalyst.

Like Alexandra, if you’re utterly congruent with the fullness of who you are, instead of performing, you offer your full, embodied existence to the situation. Victoria did just that. On day 1 of her cycle, she had to give a talk about menstrual awareness to a group of her colleagues, men and women. She knew this in advance and it wasn’t going to be ideal, but she prepared herself well.

‘I used all of my cycle that month to help me organize my talk,’ she recalls. And she chose to reveal the fact that she was menstruating to the group: ‘I thought that my situation would actually be a good introduction to the talk. I felt vulnerable and I admitted as much. I was very open and it was refreshing for me and for some of the audience.’

Again, remember the Big Red Rule. It’s very easy to fall into the trap of creating idealized ideas about where you need to be, and what you need to be doing at any given time in your cycle (especially if you’ve read it in a book such as *Wild Power!*). But that’s a trap because you lose sight of the realities of your own life.

You’re no longer working that edge of responding to what’s inside with what’s going on outside, and that’s the real force that hones your Wild Power. Beware, again, of letting the pendulum swing too far – you don’t need to put up with or suffer your circumstances completely. You have the choice to say ‘no’, to plan things differently, and to act on your own needs and desires.

Sjanie employed the art of menstruality on day 27 of her cycle, when hosting her daughter’s fifth birthday party. Her whole psyche was all lined up for an

expansive, spacious, loved-up, ecstatic state away from the world. But instead, she found herself DJing musical statues, serving food and responding to the needs of seven noisy five-year-olds. Clearly not ideal.

But with awareness, she was able to trust the tension between the circumstances and her cycle. And out popped the discovery of just how her critic comes into play, and the awful physiological response she has when she's in a position of being 'responsible' for things, such as ensuring that the party went well for everyone.

She learnt that when she leads or is in charge, she can easily exclude the inner (and outer) support that's available to her. The power in her that really wants to wake up is her capacity to let herself be supported when she leads, and to trust that life's perfection always pours through. Thanks to MCA, Sjanie got to see and know this first-hand.

In our culture we've privileged certain types of intelligence, ways of operating and types of power. With this level of cycle awareness we invite you to reject this stale formula of how you should manage your life, or respond.

Instead, get into the spontaneity of your own being, which is completely cyclical, ever changing and makes for an utterly original encounter with your life's circumstances each and every time.

Rather than replay the past, you're in the present. This is creative living. You live the evolutionary edge – the evolutionary power of the cycle – to channel something bigger than you, the Feminine.

'It's ironic, as I spent many years diving into yogic practices where I ended up spiritually bypassing my truth. By honouring my menstrual cycle, I'm able to feel true union between my body, mind and spirit – my own inner yoga practice.'

SUBPREET

LEARNING TO PACE YOURSELF

To pace yourself is to live in sync with your cycle energies – your own rhythm and timing. The rhythm of your menstrual cycle governs the unfolding of your Wild Power and holds the perfect timing for its realization.

Don't be afraid to pace yourself to this rhythm – it's your direct line to yourself. And it pays dividends in a way that the urgency of society's timing, or pacing, never will.

Society's timing is not personal – it's unconnected to who you are and the meaning of your unfolding story. Trying to keep up with society's timing could leave you bereft, rudderless, under pressure and stressed to the point where your creativity shuts down.

The pace of society isn't connected to your needs and nature, nor is it connected to the ineffable forces working you. If you march to outer rhythms all the time, you lose connection to your inner authority and the true engine that drives your Wild Power.

If you're connected to your own cycle, you'll find it much easier to trust your own timing and not get caught up in the urgency around you. There's a natural momentum, an effortless flow.

You won't have that feeling of being left behind or not keeping up, or having to push against your own nature. It's as if you're held by something greater that's giving meaning to your way and speed of doing things. Timing is at work in you.

Timing is always on your side, but you can't rush your trust and embodiment of it. It's something you learn with age and an ongoing commitment to cycle

awareness. In particular you're tutored in this through the second half of the cycle and you'll begin to appreciate it more and more as you get older.

When you're younger and more engulfed in the power of agency – which *does* have an urgency about it, and that's as it should be – it's more challenging to trust Timing.

CREATIVE TIMING

The menstrual cycle is the embodiment of the creative process. The phases of the creative process are reflected in each phase of the cycle. There's an order and necessity to each phase of creativity, which your menstrual cycle holds you to, if you're paying attention.

When you're respecting the changing mood and energy of your cycle, you're honouring the creative process and getting actual support for each phase of it, which will allow your creative projects to flourish in their right time.

The more you understand timing, and the rhythm of your creative process, the less likely you are to label your hesitations and the 'putting off of things' as procrastination.

The word 'procrastination' has a pejorative tone. It's the inner or outer critic wagging its proverbial finger at you for not 'getting on with things'. What this usually means is not dancing to society's timing for when you should be delivering, which is always yesterday!

At its heart, procrastination is usually a disconnection from your own true creative Calling and an inability to appreciate and trust its organic timing. The more you can learn to trust your cycle's timing, the more you can connect into a wonderful, ineffable sense of knowing – a feeling that you *are* being held and guided by something larger.

The speed and pace of the world around you and the inner rhythm of your cycle will often appear to be at odds, an element of cycle awareness that makes for a lively creative tension and sometimes an immense challenge. This is what creates opportunities to practise the 'art of menstruality'.

Much like being a musician in an improvisation group, there's a sweet spot that can be found within this tension that comes from first being intimately committed to listening to the inspiration that's coming through you, and then opening to what's around you. Slowly allowing your music to subtly shift and form to find its place within the sounds around you.

If you hold to your own rhythm so tightly that you're blinkered to the music of life, you'll create more inner tension and disharmony – still operating out of a paradigm of disconnection, distrust and a belief that it's 'them' or 'me'. Pacing yourself to find your groove takes a light touch and an unyielding commitment to your cycle.

When you approach your life in this way you'll soon discover that there's always a way for you to be and belong with what's happening around you. Even the most unlikely contrasts and extremes can find attunement and synchrony if we begin from a lovingly embodied place.

The cycle is your pulse, your organic timekeeper and the guardian of your inner song. If you let it be your metronome, and trust it deeply enough to live by it, you'll discover the ever deepening sweet spot where it truly feels as if all of life is now marching in tune.

But this, Dear One, is a strong practice of ongoing surrender, and commitment to always letting your cycle – Nature – be your guide.

MCA FOR THOSE WITHOUT A CYCLE

If you have no cycle because of a health condition, use of hormonal contraception, the perimenopause, menopause or postmenopause, and want to reap some of the benefits of cycle awareness, you can simply chart your feelings and energy in conjunction with the phases of the moon.

Regard the new moon as day 1 of your cycle, follow the instructions for MCA above, and apply the information we share on the menstrual cycle to your moon cycle. It could also prove to be part of a sweet way to entice your cycle to return if it has unexpectedly gone awry.

If you're in menopause, charting the moon cycle helps you to recover some of the cycle knowledge, the 'backstory', you may have consciously missed during your menstruating years.

Amanda came across this work as she was going through menopause and found it invaluable for understanding aspects of herself and her life that had, until that time, eluded her. 'It's definitely possible to go back and restore order to the cycle in the perimenopause or menopause, whether literally or energetically,' she says.

'It would be wonderful to relive those years with this information, but it's *still* wonderful to be able to reframe them in this context and to apply the learning to life now. I'm a lot kinder towards myself – realizing I had to face some challenges without any of this knowledge. And I congratulate myself on unwittingly tending to myself when I did.'

‘MENSTRUAL TRAUMA’

Rather than feeling empowered by the cycle as a spiritual practice, the truth is, many women today feel disturbed by it, and some experience quite extreme suffering, including mental health issues that show up cyclically.

There’s a huge litany of menstrual symptoms, and we have to ask ourselves why this happens when the menstrual cycle is a normal, healthy process *and* our original spiritual practice. How has it come to this sorry state of affairs, and what might it be saying?

Our suffering has its roots in the cultural denial and fear of our menstrual reality and power. At the heart is our failure to recognize the spiritual depths, in particular the Holy Grail moment. It has caused many women to doubt or pathologize their own experiences of the cycle, in particular, premenstrually and menstrually.

This is a form of ‘gaslighting’, a term used to describe psychological abuse that aims surreptitiously to destroy a victim’s trust in their own perceptions of reality, so they end up not trusting themselves.

On reflection, Alexandra can now see that a subtle form of gaslighting hampered her early experience and appreciation of the cycle. As her pain reduced, she began to relish deeply the glorious altered state of consciousness that menstruation is – the bliss, love and ecstasy – but could end up doubting it by the time she got to ovulation.

There was no outer affirmation; no one else was speaking of it. Yet, when she came round to the bleed again, there it was – the same glorious feelings, the sense of utter rightness about herself. She looks back now in disbelief that she

could almost have been conned out of such blessed states of being.

Gaslighting damages our trust in ourselves and our experiences of reality, and makes it easier for others to manipulate and control us. We end up at odds with the truth of what we know and experience.

It's crucial that we speak and share freely with other women to discover that we're not mad and that the deep and powerful states possible in all phases of the cycle are real and normal. They only *feel* wrong because we're not able to follow and support our process.

The cycle offers you a direct line to yourself. It has a built-in imperative to deliver you home to your deep, holy self.

Over centuries, consistently denying, interrupting and overriding this knowledge has caused a subtle insult to the integrity of our being as women. It continues today, and will do so as long as we deny the cycle's reality.

Like little electric shocks, over time it leads to an inner numbing, a gradual wearing down of our vital signs on all levels. We've coined the phrase 'menstrual trauma' to describe this form of gaslighting. We believe menstrual trauma is at the root of our menstrual suffering.

Begin to restore the power of the cycle, however modestly, and over time you reshape your experience of yourself; you soothe your whole system, release this subtle 'trauma' and ease your symptoms. For some women the effect is immediate, for others it's a slower process and needs to be combined with other self-care practices. And for others still, the answers are more complex and may require considerable input from the many health modalities available today.

Regardless of the level of your suffering, with the restoration of awareness of the cycle's power comes meaning. A glimmer of empowerment can stir within the powerlessness you may feel.

This was certainly true for Alexandra in the dark old days of her pain, and it's priceless in helping you to hold to your healing course, which is always unique to you. Remember, to get extra help with the symptoms, explore our online Hormone Harmony course (see [Resources](#) section).

'Today I woke up feeling ripe and whole. I met the dawn of the day with equanimity and ease. I've not experienced this kind of morning since my life before having babies. Oh my word, how I've longed to return to this solid ground, to feel myself, to remember the wider world.'

SJANIE, DAY 14

INTERRUPTIONS, DISTURBANCES AND SYMPTOMS

As we've just described, ignoring the cycle puts a strain on your being – psychologically and physically. It's an ongoing, low-grade stress to your system. For those of you with more sensitive natures and immune systems, combined with other life stressors, this suppression can tip over into menstrual problems. While the reasons for menstrual suffering are multifaceted, consider the following:

- What if, at the heart of it, your body was crying out for you and our times to honour the powerful wisdom of the cycle?
- What if challenges and symptoms were red lights alerting you to something about your own nature, or invitations to greater depth?
- What if your symptoms were unlived power, or a talent you've not yet been able to access?
- What if this suffering were the shadow side of not knowing about the hidden resources of your cycle? And not being supported to value and honour your cycle's imperatives?
- What if the suffering held the key to your Wild Power?

You'd be excused, of course, for not having 'got' this power stuff – a few thousand years of menstrual loathing and rejection has made sure of that. And, even now, we're hardly living a menstrual love fest.

If the idea that disturbances in the cycle could be connected to not honouring its wisdom – or that power is lurking in your menstrual woes – seem preposterous or impossible, not to worry. Menstrual cycle awareness has your back and over time you can slowly (or quickly) recover what's yours.

Let's park the idea of trying to fix or heal your symptoms for a little while and instead approach your troubles as simply a phenomenon – your body system trying to catch your attention. In fact, often the only way you're ever going to learn about menstrual cycle powers is *because* of your symptoms.

Our whole society is geared towards menstrual denial, and symptoms have a way of disrupting or interrupting that status quo. They drag you away from 'normal' life, and destabilize your sense of safety just enough that you dig more deeply to allow another reality to come through. The symptom can be the necessary obstacle or challenge needed to awaken you to your power, like a mini initiation.

This is exactly what happened to Alexandra when her mad menstrual pain erupted more than 30 years ago. She stopped doing business as usual during her bleed, she simply couldn't, and she refused to take drugs because she knew that to be a poisoned chalice. And so she was left exposed to menstruation.

Oh my, did the scales begin to fall from her eyes – yes, even as she was suffering. Out of nowhere came the decision to believe in and follow her body – an early prototype of cycle awareness. She didn't get the fullness of the power of menstruation overnight, and you might not either – although we sincerely hope it will be a lot faster than it was for Alexandra. She was, after all, in those days inventing the metaphorical wheel.

We dare to say that the louder the symptom, the bigger the roar of your potential power. Take it as a compliment as you wrestle with what can

sometimes feel like insane, intractable suffering. You have something important trying to realize itself.

We women carry an inordinate amount of suffering because of the historical load of denial. If you're naturally sensitive you may feel this even more acutely. Don't take your symptoms personally – they're not living proof of your inadequacies or a personal failure.

Rather, they reveal the degree to which we collectively deny the huge spiritual imperative held within our bodies as women. Perhaps the most important remedy will be when all of us, or a good majority of us, restore this knowledge.

FOUR PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS FOR HEALING

While we think of this whole book as a remedy for whatever cycle disruptions or symptoms you're experiencing, we've broken it down here into what we call the four psycho-spiritual foundations for healing.

1. Learn about the three inner maps

Just understanding the cycle's inner architecture – the three archetypal menstrual maps – is a core pillar of healing. Learn about The Two *Vias*; the natural powers of each Inner Season and the seasonal initiatory tasks; the imperatives of the crossover days and the sacred tasks and powers of The Five Chambers of Menstruation (see [Chapters 3–5](#)).

When disturbance happens, whether physical or emotional, place the issue within the context of your cycle. Notice which day or season it shows up: this will reveal something of the power it holds. Please refer to [the Menstruality Power Chart](#) for a quick guide to the powers of the cycle.

We've also created the Red Power Cards, which contain 13 powers from each season of the cycle. You can use them as an aid to inquiry and for insight into healing. Find out more at www.redschool.net/powercards

2. Practise MCA

Do this to build mindfulness, to get to know your cycle pattern and to plan your life according to your natural tendencies in each phase (see the beginning of this chapter for the full MCA practice).

Knowledge of the three inner maps is going to break open as you engage in cycle awareness. MCA is a potent form of medicine that can ease symptoms in and of itself.

3. Restore the natural order of the cycle

Get to know each season and identify your needs in each. This will allow you to care better for who you are in each phase of the cycle, restoring the order of the cycle. Your task is to *really* value each phase and give each its due.

If you experience the complete opposite of what we've described for a season, this will give you useful insight about your overall wellbeing, character and needs. To help deepen this inquiry, we recommend a one-to-one session with a Red School Mentor using a process we've developed called the Menstrual Medicine Circle. Find a mentor at redschooll.net/mentors/

4. Honour the *via negativa*

Often, it's the second half of the cycle, and our ability to engage with the *via negativa*, that's more challenging, and this shows up as what we typically call PMS. Coming to understand this part of the cycle in a new light is, for most of us, the psychological underpinning needed to reclaim our feminine power. We reframe this phase in [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#).

Remember, it's menstrual cycle awareness that unlocks your power. The cyclical symptoms you experience are an important part of your power story and MCA gives you the means to make sense of, heal, and unleash the power within your symptoms.

Rounding up

Menstrual cycle awareness is a means of insight, healing and finding meaning – nourishing a rich spiritual life. It's in the act of letting go into and trusting your own cycle experience that your practice emerges.

Living with cycle awareness restores soul to everyday life – it's a tangible way of healing that chasm that can so often form between spiritual and mundane life. In the next chapter we take the bull by the horns and look at how we can bring this spiritual practice back firmly into the centre of our lives, in a culture that doesn't value it... *yet*.



Chapter 9

How the F*ck Do We Live Our Cycle in a Non-cyclical World?

One of the greatest challenges of getting to know your cycle is learning how to live with it in a world that doesn't value and accommodate it. We're no strangers to this challenge, having wrestled with it all our menstruating lives, and have discovered that there are not one or two, but *many* workarounds.

Remember, MCA is going to be your most crucial practice for getting to know your unique rhythm of power and learning how to live in sync with it.

In this chapter we begin by sharing a few helpful perspectives and ways of organizing your life practically around your cycle. We then share our repertoire of cunning tips, tricks and cycle-savvy methods for carving out space and time to follow your own unique cyclical pattern and work *with* the tension when life isn't fitting into the pattern of your cycle. This is how we create a cycle-smart world from the inside out.

‘UNDERCOVER AGENTS’ FOR CHANGING YOUR WORLD

The answer to ‘How?’ all begins with you, and the following subtle yet formidable choices that we call your ‘four undercover agents’. They’re at your personal service and champion your full right to embody your menstruality consciousness and claim what’s yours – an unapologetic, unashamed, and fully respected cycle-centred life.

1. Acceptance

We've said it before and we'll say it again: the number one way for changing everything is accepting your own cycle. This applies regardless of the situations you find yourself in, whether you can follow your cycle or not, or follow it in the way you think you should.

Acceptance is extraordinarily powerful in affecting your cycle experience, and in changing the world. When you're at peace with your cycle you create a sweet intimacy with yourself that's magnetizing – you generate a subtle energy field around you that affects everyone and everything you come into contact with.

2. Intention

This is a powerful tool for any area of your life, and one that we encourage you to commit to. Intention-setting has a way of stimulating inspirations and actions almost immediately and can lead to the fulfilment of your idea or dream. The more you strongly and clearly state your intention about how you'd like to live with and experience your cycle, the more it manifests and the more you discover about your Wild Power.

Remember, you can also potentize your intention for the coming month by setting it at menstruation. We call this the 'Bleed on It method', and you'll find instructions for it later in this chapter.

3. Imagination

Born out of acceptance, your imagination ushers in change and the possibility of a new world. If it doesn't exist yet, *imagine* it real – picture a menstrual-positive culture. Let the dust storm of what's gone before settle, and stay connected to the new ways that you're envisioning and practising.

We regularly do this and call it 'telling the new story of menstruation'. To our joy we're seeing more and more signs of this becoming real, particularly in the media and in conversations in the public arena, such as science, sport, education, comedy and the workplace.

4. Entitlement

It's a tricky one to claim but the practice of cycle awareness naturally builds your sense of entitlement, your right to this knowledge and a cycle-centred life. Through observation your cyclical rhythm becomes inseparable from who you are as a woman. In no time at all you'll clearly stake your right to fully embody it in the world. You'll literally feel a new swagger in your hips: a new sense of authority that says you *do* have a right to this.

DON'T GO IT ALONE: CALL ON YOUR ALLIES

With the undercover agents on side, you've already started to change things from the inside out. Now it's time to call in the outer allies and get the people in your life on board.

A cycle-centred family life

Let your partner in on your MCA discoveries. Share with them your emotional and physical needs and tendencies in each season and how your sexual energy varies. In our experience men love to be in on the mysteries of the cycle and want to know more about our needs and tendencies.

Your partner can be an awesome ally in your cyclical life, if only you let him or her. You could also ask your partner to chart what they observe happening in your cycle. This spontaneously arose for Andie when her husband created a visual map of what he noticed about her in each season. It's a lovely, playful way of deepening into the menstrual magic.

As you embody your cycle and share it naturally as part of everyday life, you're educating your children in cycle-centred living.

Laura has a family calendar on the kitchen wall that includes her menstrual cycle dates. When members of the family are making appointments, they are mindful of her menstrual time and arrange things accordingly.

Through conversations with your children, and getting them on board, don't be surprised to hear something similar to what Amber heard one day. Her five-year-old son, who is usually a 'little wildling', said: 'Mummy, I've made a teddy hospital so you can play a gentle game while you have your period.'

To really let go and bleed, you do need your family onside, carrying some of the daily load for you. Don't underestimate the power of having your space *consciously* protected and held by your nearest and dearest while you menstruate. Also consider the possibility that your menstrual cycle is not just holding you: it offers a sustainable and healthy rhythm for your whole family to abide by and be held in.

A cycle-centred community

The menstrual cycle is a shared experience among all menstruating woman, so you can be allies for each other. Don't struggle on alone, call on friends, sisters and neighbours, and 'raise the red flag' when you want practical help. Lean into the support of your community, especially if you have children, and ask for help when you need some time out from mothering or cooking.

Diane shared her knowledge on the cycle with the group of mothers in her child's class at school and they developed a lovely shorthand for communicating with each other using the seasons.

One woman could just say, for example, 'I'm in winter,' and the others would know not to make demands of her, such as asking for childcare support. It was a way for the group to indicate where they were at in the cycle and support each other through that lens. It worked well for them.

Knowing that your community 'gets' where you're at can really help you to follow your cycle's imperatives, without feeling as if it's a problem, which is often what we're taught to feel.

Over the past 10 years there's been a growing movement to return menstrual knowledge to community life, as Red Tents have popped up in neighbourhoods everywhere.

A Red Tent gathering, inspired by the ancient tradition of women retreating together for menstruation, is a circle of women that typically meets monthly to spend time together sharing, talking and listening. If this appeals to you, seek out your local Red Tent gathering, or start your own. See our online resources for more information: www.redschool.net/resources.

A cycle-centred workplace

If you're in gainful employment you may be expected to show up at work and do your job in the same way every day of the month. Some bosses and companies may be open to learning about how the cycle can enhance women's skills and abilities, and be happy to support that.

At Red School we helped to pioneer a 'Period Policy' with a UK-based company that wants to make cycle-awareness explicit in its workplace. Perhaps this is something your company would consider introducing? At Red School we have a menstruality policy officer whom you can consult for education about how cycle knowledge is an asset for a business, and get guidance and instruction on creating a formal policy for your organization. (For more information visit www.redschool.net/policy)

If you laugh out loud at the thought of your workplace as 'menstrual positive', could you get just one or two allies at work? Let your personal cycle-awareness practice inform your working life, even if you do still have to rock up at work when you'd rather be at home menstruating in peace.

When you menstruate, go more slowly, work more quietly, take all the pressure off yourself and just let yourself cruise in your own little menstrual bubble. No one need know or guess that you're deep in your menstrual cave.

For one woman who had a very busy job managing a lot of people, failing to show up at work wasn't an option; instead, she would imagine herself protected in a cave. On the outside everything looked 'normal' but on the inside she was holding a lovely tender intimacy with herself.

Susan has suffered from bad period pain, and she also has a demanding job. During a review of her work she told her boss, a man, that she would like to

work in sync with her cycle and that this may mean taking it easy or staying at home when she menstruates (she's a straight-talking woman). She also told him that she'd make sure her work commitments didn't suffer, and compensate at other times in her cycle. He trusted her.

She organized her whole working rhythm around her cycle and let her colleagues know. In fact, she created a menstrual chart that she attached to her computer, to indicate her current day. In this way, anyone who wanted to could be 'in the know'.

Susan's personal menstrual policy has worked wonders. She seldom takes a menstrual day off now because her symptoms have improved so much. But just knowing she can, eases tension for her. Her colleagues know the best time to approach her and the best time to leave her alone. Some of them have even asked her to teach them about the cycle. And she feels that she's much more productive at work.

PLANT THE MENSTRUALITY MEME

A meme is ‘a cultural item that’s transmitted by repetition and replication in a manner analogous to the biological transmission of genes’.⁸ It’s a subversive act that can be done any old time – just drop the word into a conversation and watch the menstruality meme spread. Talking about cycle awareness may well bring in a few unexpected allies, or at the very least get the menstruality conversation going.

Adele, a secondary school English teacher, who we spoke of earlier, is a wonderful example of this. She loves her cycle and loves talking about menstruality. Her big question when she began teaching was, ‘How am I going to fit into the constricted regime of a school, where bells rather than mucus consistency tell you where you are in a week?’

Thanks to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, she got her opening. In the play, when discussing his daughter’s readiness for marriage, Juliet’s father, Lord Capulet, says that ‘She hath not seen the change of fourteen years.’ Well, Adele couldn’t resist that, and so began her conversations about menstruation.

Before long she was printing off menstrual charts for other teachers, running a biology lesson on the menstrual cycle for the male science teacher, and helping another colleague flummoxed as to why one 15-year-old girl had managed to resolve her behavioural issues nearly all the time now, but around once every month they re-arose.

He was grateful for Adele’s suggestion as to a possible cause, and ways in which he might subtly be able to account for this in his classroom. All this happened within nine weeks. ‘At this rate,’ Adele said, ‘I’ll be leading menstrual assemblies by Christmas.’

THE 1 PER CENT SHIFT

By now you're probably very familiar with this idea – the power of small moves to make big changes – as we've mentioned it quite a few times. It's one of our absolute favourite practices. We also sometimes call it 'the homeopathic dose'.

'Despite my best efforts to dodge the endless onslaught of communication and demands, letting go and clocking out this menstrual winter was hard. The moon is full, nature's in full spring, my daughters are sick and our lovely Red School online is young and calling.'

'So I took my own advice and carved out small pockets of time to drop my bundle. In the short time I had, I was able to let go, feel loved, be inspired and receive guidance for my next steps. Ahhhh, the cycle is so generous!'

SJANIE, DAY 6

The whole notion of practising cycle awareness, and organizing your life around it, may just feel impossible or overwhelming. You may find yourself constantly sitting under the thumb of what you think you 'should' be doing, falling into 'idealized' thinking and abandoning the real possibilities before you.

Well, we've got the foolproof plan for you! The 1 per cent shift is going to leverage you out of this hole and onto the fast track towards a cycle-centred life in no time at all.

~ Practice: the 1 per cent shift ~

1. Start by giving your imagination free rein and let yourself dream up what a cycle-centred life would look like for you. get a large sheet of paper and coloured pens and let rip on your high dream.
2. Don't censor yourself or let practicalities get in the way here. just imagine the ultimate scenario. employ that undercover agent of 'imagination'.
3. Now ask yourself what 1 per cent of that change would be. let it be something really small, seemingly insignificant and imminently doable.
4. Do your 1 per cent shift.
5. Alternatively, you can apply this in any given moment. For example, you wake up one morning and wish you could stay under the covers all day but work awaits. look for some way you can give yourself a small dose of hiding away. Perhaps you can reschedule a meeting (no one has to know the real reason), change your evening plans, or call work and tell them you're running late.

One woman was deeply cynical about the 1 per cent shift, giving it no credence at all. But finally she did buckle and try it, and to this day she finds it unfailingly effective. If, for example, you're a full-on mum of two young children, with a life that doesn't feel like your own, you too might feel cynical.

According to this book you're supposed to be working in sync with the cycle, resting at menstruation and tuning in to the cosmic forces. But actually it just feels like yet another job on your to-do list. As if you can stop at menstruation! It's a joke, right? No, it's not, but your version of 'stop' is going to look radically different to that of a woman without children.

'The 1 per cent concept works wonders for me. I'm Spanish and have lived in Macedonia for the last seven years with my husband, who is Macedonian, and my children, who are five and two.'

'My 1 per cent shift started as a deep shout of rebellion coming from within that broke my matrilineal tradition of always putting the family's needs before my own. I started giving myself permission to rest for at least one hour during my moon time.'

'In just a couple of months that hour has become a full day of rest, renewal and the visioning that guides me through the coming cycle. The 1 per cent shift is magic at its best!'

DESI

Rachel, mother of a toddler and self-employed, has little time for herself, even when menstruating. But she discovered that even a short period of fully surrendering could pack a punch. 'I had an hour to myself this afternoon where I retreated so deeply I almost went into a trance,' she says. 'It was like my body was saying, *Finally, you've realized what you need to do at this time.*

And, as we often warn, 1 per cent begets 2 per cent, begets...you know how the story goes. Rachel's appetite for more has been awakened: 'I now know that at some point I'll need to have much longer to myself on day 1/2.'

DEEP LISTENING

Vicky wisely noted that ‘the cycle process is simultaneously powerful and very subtle’. On one hand its effects are inescapable and blunt, on the other they are refined, ineffable and undisclosed.

The full potency, power and revelation of your cycle utterly depends on the quality of your attention – which is why we’re so hot on the practice of menstrual cycle awareness (in case you haven’t noticed!).

Deep listening is a skill you can bring to your cycle awareness practice to unearth the unconscious and unattended energies that are at work, and magnify the resources on offer.

Deep listening is the perfect precursor for cooperating with the energies of the cycle, pacing yourself well (see [Chapter 8](#)), and ‘holding the tension’, a practice we describe below.

If you’ve not done deep listening before, it may be hard to believe that something so simple will allow your menstruality experience to ‘pop’ out and come to life in a big way. We also take the idea of the power of listening further in the context of listening partnerships, which we also describe below.

Practice: deep listening

1. At any given moment in your cycle, bring yourself fully present to what's happening, without trying to control or judge it.
2. Let go of the inner clamour and the usual assumptions, and listen respectfully to your experience.
3. Let yourself be curious, and open to simply receiving whatever's happening – both inside you and around you.
4. Sustain this focused attention for as long as you can.

‘HOLDING THE TENSION’

Your biology is wired for pleasure and designed for survival. The ‘default’, if you like, is to run from discomfort and do whatever it takes to avoid difficult feelings. Many of us were parented with the attitude that crying is a problem and that difficult feelings such as anger and fear are to be avoided. Most of us have developed a range of ways to deny or seek urgent relief from the intensity of what we’re experiencing.

But what if you consciously choose to stick with these difficult feelings? ‘Holding the tension’ is the skill that’s needed to do just that. It’s a strong and transformative act that will probably take a lot of ongoing practice.

This truly feminine way of working with ‘problems’ and discomfort makes it possible for the obstacle, difficulty or hurt to transmute organically into power. But it requires that you learn to hold your nerve and trust your cycle process.

‘Holding the tension’ is a skill that will serve you throughout your cycle, as it helps you to stay immersed in your cycle experience and be with yourself and whatever’s arising. It’s especially useful during the premenstruum, where much undigested history surfaces.

Often when we’re triggered by something and emotionally stirred up our first instinct is to react to what’s happened and to whoever is in the firing line. We may argue, make a cutting remark, shout back, throw a plate (even if you’ve never done that, you’ve probably wanted to), storm off, and the like.

‘Holding the tension’ includes *feeling* your response to what someone says, or what has happened, without jumping into your usual reaction or behaviour. The practice requires, in the moment, that you slow yourself down enough to watch

the charge of emotion going through you and just hang out with it.

It can feel a bit like biting your tongue, but by preserving your reactions with awareness, you begin to create more inner spaciousness around the issue, revealing to yourself a more honest response that leads you to the truth of what you're feeling or needing. This spaciousness heralds in more choice, and having choices is everything. The choice not to react, and the choice to do something different.

Psychotherapist Matt Licata, one of our favourite writers and bloggers, says it beautifully: 'In a moment of radical attunement and self-love, you can contain and hold what is appearing, and meet it with your presence. And in the thundering silence of the here and now, you can chart a new course.'⁹

The very act of holding the tension with gentle awareness in itself reduces the drama and softens the tension between you and whatever's happening.

It brings in the opportunity for more kindness and love for yourself and the situation. Which in turn gives you the wherewithal to see and possibly understand different perspectives. It's an effective way to end a power struggle or an unhealthy dynamic in a relationship as it allows you to get to the bottom of why you're triggered and then, at a less charged time, cleanly deliver to the other person the truth of how you feel.

Because you're less reactive, and probably able to put things in a more palatable way, they're more likely to 'hear' you and respond in a fresh way that will bring a new outcome. This may not be something you do every time you're triggered, but even occasionally employing this practice is going to reap dividends.

'My skin is crawling with irritation after a day of insane and relentless demands from my kids. At times I've descended into a rabid child myself and had to grasp a modicum of maturity to prevent myself from squashing them like ants.'

'I'm really struggling to hold the tension today... I've got to hold my

hand up to say, dear friends, that the tension has me by the short 'n curlies.'

SJANIE, DAY 23

Sjanie has had loads of practice at holding the tension, especially premenstrually, when her own needs are stronger and she's confronted with the persistent demands of her young children. She recalls one incident on day 25 of her cycle. She was standing in her kitchen at some ungodly hour after a night of broken sleep, her girls shouting at the tops of their voices a never-ending list of urgent and insane demands.

She felt her jaws clench, her stomach grip and a rise of red-hot rage throughout her body. She wanted to shout at them to be quiet, but instead caught herself, stopped in her tracks, felt the strong feelings and muttered a few expletives under her breath (muttering is allowed).

As she held the tension and the force of her reaction she began to experience a little more buffer between herself and her children, which allowed her to shift gear, sense her deep need for silence and space (rightfully so given that her cycle was preparing her to enter expanded states of consciousness at menstruation) and respond to her children in a more connected way.

~ Practice: holding the tension ~

1. In general, practise deep listening – notice, take in and give attention to what you sense, feel and think.
2. When you're triggered it may be helpful to create a conditioned anchor to help you pause. For example, over time, Alexandra has developed an almost Pavlovian response when she's triggered. She immediately says to herself, *Keep quiet, Pope, just listen.*

'Breathe, expand and include' is a great little mantra that Sjanie learnt from her Movement Medicine supervisor, Sue Khun. it's a useful thing to say to yourself when you practise 'holding the tension'. it may only be for a few seconds but it briefly interrupts reactivity and offers an opening for something different.

3. Stabilize yourself within the moment – bring your consciousness to bear on what you're experiencing and the discomfort that you feel.
4. Resist the urge to react, fix or explain it. if possible, remove yourself from the situation.
5. Sit with the sensations: get inside them and let them be.

Again, we turn to Matt Licata's words to sum up this practice: 'Slow way down

and open into the life that is flowing through you. Place your awareness into the core of the tenderness and breathe with it. Oxygenate it not only with the clarity of an outside witness, but by way of intimacy, flooding it with the heart-qualities of kindness, compassion, and warmth.’[10](#)

DOING NOTHING

This is a skill that requires considerable practice – you laugh because you know it's true. Doing nothing is a refined art that we seem to have lost. Women at our workshops genuinely ask us *how* to do nothing, partly in disbelief that we actually mean *do nothing*.

So, to speak to the part of you that always wants to be busy, distracted and on the move, here's what you can do. Resist the temptation to turn on the television or computer; dodge the urge to tidy just one more thing, or somehow multitask doing nothing with doing something.

Doing nothing means having no agenda, zero power of agency, and allowing yourself to drift and potter.

Forgive all your damning self-judgement, and the voice in your head that tells you you're lazy, slovenly or useless. Give up the idea that your worth depends on what you do and how much you produce.

Sit back and watch all the inner commentary trying to throw you off course – *This is a waste of time; What's the point of this?* and *If you really do stop, you may never get going again*. Risk being bored and simply hang out with yourself in the emptiness.

This practice is especially powerful when the urge to do nothing comes at menstruation. If the idea terrifies you or makes your feet itch, start small and let it grow. Remember the 1 per cent shift.

Carve out a small chunk of time to do nothing and, if you find it a struggle, work with 'holding the tension'. For a while doing nothing may feel incredibly

uncomfortable, but if you stick with it you'll soon discover that doing nothing has a magical way of leading you to everything your heart truly desires, including the full loving power of menstruation.

'How much did I rest during menstruation? It's at this point in my cycle that it really starts to show. Today the rising energy of my inner spring is filled with hot air. There are no balls in my bag. My lunch box is empty. My cylinders are firing blanks.'

'With humility I acknowledge I have much to learn about truly resting and letting go amidst the demands of life with small kids and a highly charged Calling.'

SJANIE, DAY 10

FORMING A LISTENING PARTNERSHIP

We strongly encourage you to create a formal partnership that's dedicated to talking and hearing about your menstrual cycle awareness practice – what's known as a listening partnership.^{[11](#)}

The essence of your menstruality is born out of relationship – a deep, sweet, tender connection to your own lived experience of the cycle and also your relationship with others in the sharing and living of this experience.

But even more than that, the collective power of women coming together can birth something quite original that can't be easily known or accessed on our own. Patriarchy understood this perfectly, and the two ways it managed to control women were to separate us from each other and vilify, demonize and stamp out our ways and practices. Instinctively, it was known that if women could gather, creative sparks would fly, and our knowledge, and therefore our power, would return.

Listening partnerships are alchemical: they catalyse an awareness and authority that we didn't know we had. That is your Wild Power making herself known in you. Both the act of respectful listening and the experience of being listened to, create a special zone or territory around you – a protected space from the stuff of normal life that invites in the mysterious.

The presence of the other is what helps to hold the space and make it magical or holy. And, above all, dignify your experience. It allows you to hear, feel and sense yourself ever more deeply and find your own inner knowing, insights and solutions to any challenges you face. It is also a means of self-soothing.

A listening partnership creates focused time, care and attention for what wants to

emerge. Hearing another's experience can shed light on your own. You're as much received in the listening as in the sharing. Think of it as a co-creative, co-productive space, opening each other up through the quality of presence.

~ Practice: form a listening partnership ~

1. Pair up with someone who practises cycle awareness. (if you join our online community you can find a listening partner there; visit www.redschool.net/community)
2. Meet regularly – for example, once a week or every two weeks – in person, by phone or Skype.
3. Set a clear container of time by using a timer. Divide the time equally to listen and be listened to.
4. Take turns to speak while the other person simply listens. this is *not* a *conversation* between you, so don't interrupt, comment or ask questions unless you're seeking clarity. Small acknowledgements that you're listening, empathizing and taking things in can be helpful, but first ask your partner if that's what they'd like.
5. Complete each person's speaking turn with the listener asking a couple of practical questions to clear the speaker's 'palate'. For example: 'name three items in your refrigerator' or 'name three types of cloud'.

For more detailed information on listening partnerships, join the Menstrual Cycle Literacy online course (see [Resources](#) section).

‘Having a listening partnership has been a revelation to me. It means that I stop once a week, reflect on and, more importantly, hear out loud, my reflections on my cycle. For me, this has crystallized patterns that were harder to see through sheaves of charts.’

LOTTIE

‘The listening partnership has helped me to deeply understand how to listen – both to myself and others – as well as to fully experience being heard.’

‘Sometimes it’s seeing a hidden or unnamed part of me reflected in my partner’s words. Other times it’s simply the silent companionship and privilege of walking alongside another’s journey.’

MAHARANI

Bringing MCA to your listening partnership

While MCA is a practice you have within you, it's in the sharing of it with another that insight and healing can come through more powerfully. You can bring MCA to your listening partnership specifically to heal symptoms.

During a listening partnership, describe the symptom and allow yourself to go deeper into it as you talk out loud about whatever comes to you in the moment. Your partner's attention offers a holding that allows your wisdom to come through. Often just sharing, especially something that you've never before spoken of, can cast a light on the symptom and transform it.

In Sjanie's listening partnership she focused on her day-12 wobble and through talking out loud she unearthed some old memories of how she'd felt as a teenager, and the shame she'd experienced about her visibly blossoming sexuality.

She also tapped into unconscious feelings of fear that she recognized came from a cultural message that showing one's sexuality is asking for trouble. The next month she had a very different day-12 experience. The MCA plus listening partnership combo really packs a punch.

Finally, we want to emphasize that while we regard menstrual cycle empowerment as a foundational remedy for healing, it is *not* a substitute for all the great natural remedies and healing approaches that abound today and can bring considerable relief and healing.

Don't abandon your healthy diet or any other approach you're using, but do throw cycle awareness into that mix. It could just be the crucial catalyst for transforming everything.

THE BLEED ON IT METHOD

We love this one. The Bleed on It method is the menstrual cycle's answer to how to solve intractable problems, 'wondering what the hell my life is about' dilemmas, and answering questions such as 'How the f*ck do I live the cycle in a non-cyclical world?'

If you have an issue you want to resolve, rather than 'sleeping on it' try 'bleeding on it'. Your menstrual cycle is a container of time to incubate an issue, and menstruation itself opens you to guidance from your deep being.

Again, it doesn't involve trying to think about a solution; rather, it allows the space for it to reveal itself. You can also take a number of cycles to deepen into a big life change – each cycle giving you another level of meaning and clarity.

Anna was making some huge life decisions. She had hit that moment in her PhD – a classic time in the creative process – of wanting to abandon it all. She was also contemplating whether or not to get married. She was uncertain what to do and decided to bleed on it. It took two or three cycles for her being to integrate around these questions and for the answer to come through. But when it did, it was a clear 'yes' to both.

~ Practice: the Bleed on It method ~

1. Set an intention: state clearly out loud, like a declaration to the universe, the problem or issue for which you seek guidance. this statement can be as simple or as grand as you want it to be.

If you have the luxury of time, it's good to do this at the beginning of the cycle so you have the whole month to let the issue incubate – this is especially important if you're dealing with big life challenges. You might also want to create a special ritual for the declaration.

2. Observe, gather and incubate: once you've made your declaration, let go of trying to solve the issue. As you go about your day-to-day business, simply pay attention, at a subtle level, to signs, signals and clues. Both from within yourself (including your feelings and dreams and any ideas that pop into your head) as well as feedback from the World. imagine the World is speaking to you on this issue.
3. You don't need to be overly focused. on the contrary, a little forgetting is good. the attention you do give is more of a gentle sideways look – a sensing as much as an actual seeing. Simply hold your observations inside you.

If you find yourself getting anxious about still not having an answer (you might be someone who finds it difficult to take a back seat), remind yourself there's still time. if you hurry yourself you'll be interrupting the very process that's playing out through your cycle, trying to give you the clarity you seek.

4. Use the power of menstruation to receive. Slow down as you approach menstruation, follow the inner promptings to let go and empty out, and give

yourself some space to do nothing and simply rest. throughout the Chambers of Menstruation, stay open to what wants to be known.

5. You may feel an in-rushing of energy, an inspiration, or a deep, quiet certainty or knowing. Chambers 4 and 5 can be particularly illuminating, almost like a clear command to oneself. But to catch this moment of clarity you need to keep a degree of closeness to yourself and the menstruation process.

Rounding up

The ideas we've presented above are what we've discovered works. They've emerged out of our, and other women's, lived experiences and the necessary experiments we've carried out for practising cycle awareness in a culture that doesn't yet honour it.

This is not meant to be a definitive list of tips for a cycle-savvy life: we simply want to get you started on this untrodden path, and as you do so your own ways and means will arise organically. Share widely whatever you discover and learn. We're all contributing to this growing body of cycle-centred knowledge. And, as we collectively make this shift, we generate the conditions that support those who suffer from menstrual problems to heal.



Epilogue

Love Your Cycle – and Change the World

What has at best been seen as an important biological process is now ‘officially’ being unveiled as a woman’s spiritual practice – your most potent ally for creating inner *and* outer change. The simple (and radical) act of loving your cycle has far-reaching effects that grow exponentially as more and more women come to rest in their cyclical nature.

Through each individual woman’s experience and sharing of their cyclical process, this menstruality body of knowledge evolves. Our menstruality experience exists within a context – this beautiful planet of ours. It awakens us to our responsibility for the planet.

Our menstruality is a deeply internal process that takes us into the most intimate places in ourselves, and within that reveals the World, the Whole, and our role in serving it.

It’s a unifying consciousness that connects us to all of life. Menstruality is the Feminine in action. It’s the channel through which the Feminine can be experienced and integrated back into our lives and on to the planet. Through consciously working with your menstruality, you provide the channel to restore the power of the Feminine in all areas of life.

THE STAGES OF YOUR WILD POWER

Your initiation into your Wild Power begins with your first bleed. In your 20 and 30s – the first part of this lifelong journey – the door opens to a rich inner process of getting to know yourself and learning to care for your own nature.

During these years you're tutored, in particular, in the power of agency. The cycle supports you to develop a healthy ego, good boundaries and an attitude of inner kindness. Driven by ambition and full of youthful vitality, it's a time of experimentation, ideas, achieving goals and manifestation. You learn to assert your desires, make things happen and 'build a life' for yourself. It's the time to declare, 'this is me'.

'Complexity has arrived. Along with restlessness and a yearning for more. I'm feeling so ready to hop out of my box and see the world with different eyes.'

SJANIE, DAY 21

As you shift into your 40s and 50s you start to engage in more complexity, depth and subtlety. In this second half of your fertile life you come to know more intimately the power of encounter, and develop the capacity to be in the unknown and work with what's emerging. It's no longer about your will and your ego; instead, you're guided by something larger – by the meaning of your life here on this planet, and your responsibility to this Earth.

Every month throughout your menstruating years, you experience a mini version of this lifelong initiatory process, as you ride the currents of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* of your cycle. This mini version is the practice ground for your life's journey, preparing you for each step along the way.

Menopause is the final phase, the initiatory zenith. If a woman has lived this journey consciously she feels the readiness of her spirit to step fully into claiming her Wild Power and serving the world.

While it can feel like stepping off the edge of a cliff – where you need the courage not to look down – many months of menstruating builds in you a knowing you're being held. If menstruation is a mini ego death each month, then menopause is the mother of all ego deaths that ultimately announces you and your fully integrated Calling to the World.

Regardless of whether or not you work this menstrual journey consciously, at menopause you're still going to undergo a great opening to the spiritual dimension. But you'll have missed out on the preparation, and the opening may be too much.

Your world may blow apart in a way that's messy, unsafe and destructive – leaving you feeling overwhelmed, or retreating into the safe confines of cynicism. Without conscious preparation, menopause can feel like a trauma rather than a challenging and meaningful completion of your initiation.

Postmenopause, when the dust has settled, you'll be able to look back on your life and see clearly the divine choreography that has delivered you to your rightful place.

THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR WILD POWER

The menstrual cycle is here to serve you, and it's here to serve the world. It's profoundly intimate and utterly universal. A woman who is being worked by her cycle brings the power to create seemingly impossible changes that are much needed. The planet is at a crisis point environmentally, economically and politically.

We believe that at the heart of this lies our disconnection from the Feminine, and the oppression of women. The work of recovering the collective power of our menstrual cycles can reinstate the Feminine in a very real, organic way.

This is world-changing work. There's a magic that's unleashed when a woman is really congruent with her cycle: she starts to organize the atmosphere around her in this new rhythm of living, of respect for organic life. In this way she influences her children, partner, friends and community. She models radical self-care and sustainable living.

When we women are grounded in our cyclical energy, we're rooted in the potency of Women's Ways and able to relax into our feminine power. We can restore the power dynamic between men and women, liberating ourselves as we free men to their Ways.

Reverence for the cycle process gives a woman permission to be unique. It teaches her to think for herself and to be herself. She's a natural leader; grounded in her own authority and knowing, she can't be easily manipulated or controlled. She's a conscious creator rather than a consumer.

The cycle is uncompromising in its agenda to hold us to our truth, and so we will not abandon ourselves. Imagine the threat of this to a conformist society.

Perhaps now we can understand why the cycle has been so demonized over centuries, and why it causes so much grief to women who have been unable to listen to it for whatever reason.

‘I marvel as the trance that something is “missing” melts into the majesty of the here and now.’

SJANIE, DAY 2

On an inner level, the cycle process wakes women up; it shatters our illusions and restores us to participatory consciousness. It’s this mature form of awareness that the world is so sorely lacking.

Through cycle awareness we can come to know and celebrate our egoic self with increasing levels of awareness. Each menstrual month, as we bleed, we are opened to world consciousness. It instils a true, heartfelt connection to life and a humble responsibility to care for it.

The cycle is provocative and coaches us in the art of wise provocation. It keeps delivering us to our fierce personal edges and builds the resilience needed to stand up to bullsh*t. Cycle awareness breeds troublemakers – the kind that cause trouble where trouble is truly needed.

It’s the perfect antidote to all the cultural messages that tell us we should ‘be nice’, not rock the boat and toe the line. The cycle keeps disturbing us, until we start to pick up the role of ‘disturber’ and consciously use it to interrupt the status quo.

At the very heart of the menstrual cycle process is your spirit’s deep yearning to live a meaningful, creative and fulfilled life that wholeheartedly imparts your wild legacy when you’re done. The initiatory journey from menarche to menopause is dutifully in service of this.

The cycle can be a tough taskmaster. If you're paying attention it doesn't allow you to sidestep your Calling – it holds you to task, to purpose. It breaks down the barriers of who you think you should be and opens you to who you really are, creating an inner coherence and wholeness, an intimacy with Self. The cycle loosens the blockages to receiving and giving love, opening you to an infinite source of power and possibility.

What does a cycle-aware woman bring to the world?

She is:

- Modelling radical self-care and sustainable living.
- Her own person, grounded in her own authority and knowing. She can't be easily manipulated or controlled – she's a natural leader.
- A conscious creator rather than a consumer.
- Changing the power dynamic between men and women, liberating both.
- Developing participatory consciousness, and the maturity to move beyond ego and see herself and the world as one.
- A holy troublemaker.
- Practising soul activism – serving the world.

THE END AND A NEW BEGINNING

We have come to the end, Dear One, and so it's time to bid you *adieu*. We've loved sharing our teachings and experiences of Wild Power with you, and look forward to receiving your 'postcards' from the wilds of cyclical life.

We do love to hear about how cycle awareness touches people's lives, and the inner and outer adventures it takes you on. As you set off, we'd like to invite you to hold within you this new story of the cycle and bring as much integrity, gentleness, discipline and love as you can muster to your personal unfolding of it.

In many ways this is a new beginning for us all as we usher in a sane new world, one menstrual cycle at a time. Remember, with each and every day of cycle awareness you consciously evolve this living body of knowledge – for yourself and for us all. While it's true that you can't 'fix' the world, you can take part in its self-healing.

Your initiatory process matters. It's an intrinsic part of the ongoing evolution of menstruality consciousness and the restoration of the Feminine in the world. As global visionary Lynne Twist says, 'Yours is not a big part to play, it's not a small part – it's *your* part'.^{[12](#)}

We want to add the following reminder. If you give it attention, your menstrual cycle will lovingly hold you to it. The magic recipe is your ongoing, intimate exploration of your own cycle, sharing your discoveries with others, and daring to live its full brilliance in the world.

Join us at Red School

We have a lively, intelligent and deeply compassionate community of women at Red School who are actively participating in making real this new story. Join in the ongoing conversation that's turning the tide.

Wild Power is a journey to love, an experience of being held by the ineffable, the Divine in action.

Trust your cycle and allow Wild Power to return your sovereignty and restore the power of the Feminine.



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Epilogue

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Resources

For a full list of our recommended reading and resources go to www.redschool.net/resources

At Red School we offer in-person and online personal development programmes and professional training. Our full curriculum can be found at www.redschool.net

Our online self-study courses include:

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Acknowledgements

From the authors

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From Alexandra

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Philip Hugo Wurlitzer

Co-directors of Red School, **Alexandra Pope** and **Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer** have developed a radical new approach to women's health and wellbeing, creativity, leadership and spiritual life, based on the power of the menstrual cycle.

With combined experience in the fields of psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, coaching, embodied movement practices, teaching and facilitation, they are published authors and experts in the field of women's wellbeing and spirituality. They are a very creative and productive partnership, bringing liberal doses of irreverent humour to their work.

Between them, Alexandra and Sjanie have spent 40 years exploring and learning about menstruality from their own deeply lived experience, and the collective knowledge they have gathered from working with thousands of women.

Pioneers in this field, they have created the most comprehensive and life-changing programme available to date. They are not afraid to take an outspoken position to help shift this outrageous taboo on women's power.

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