

Good evening.

It's an honor to be here and I am glad for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts about the film and issues that the movie raises. *Tehora* presents us with the opportunity to engage in a conversation that, unfortunately, does not happen often enough in the community of niddah-observant women and men. I say unfortunately because there is a price paid for the silence surrounding the observance of these laws. I believe that the notion of *tzniut* is misapplied when it is utilized to discourage frank conversation about difficulties couples may experience in practicing niddah be they sexual, psychological or emotional, when it stands in the way of brides and grooms being adequately prepared for marriage and sex, and when incomplete or incorrect information is given to young people because of a reluctance to speak frankly and non-euphemistically.

In addition to practicing the laws of niddah, I have taught these laws as well. I taught a yearlong course to full-time female Talmud and Jewish law students at Drisha Institute, and I have instructed young couples about to be married in the practice of the laws of niddah. I have discovered that my students are looking for 2 things:

1. An understanding of the development of these laws and a framework for the many details that follow. They wish to be empowered to think intelligently and actively participate in their practice of niddah.
2. A safe environment for the expression of doubts and ambivalences and for asking frank questions about niddah and sex.

The study and practice of the laws of niddah present a host of challenges:

1. Young men and women often have inadequate information about their bodies and about sex.
2. The laws of niddah are mostly unexplored territory even for those who are quite knowledgeable about many other areas of Jewish law.
3. Men and women are educated differently with reference to the practice of niddah with women often being given the overwhelming responsibility for maintaining proper observance and with men being inadequately informed.
4. Niddah may raise many questions about the status of women in Jewish law as women are most commonly the subjects of study in the literature and are not participating in the conversations. Sustained focus on menstruation as a process that necessitates great study and concern may feel alienating and unnatural.

Some of these challenges can be addressed practically with more complete and sensitive education in which men and women are both educated in these laws and are empowered to take joint responsibility for their practice. Some of these challenges are not easily solved but I believe that allowing for freer expression of doubts, ambivalences and problems will not threaten proper observance; the doubts and mixed emotions are already there! Rather, dialogue will reduce the sense of isolation and, ultimately, I believe lead to a more satisfying observance.

Thank you.