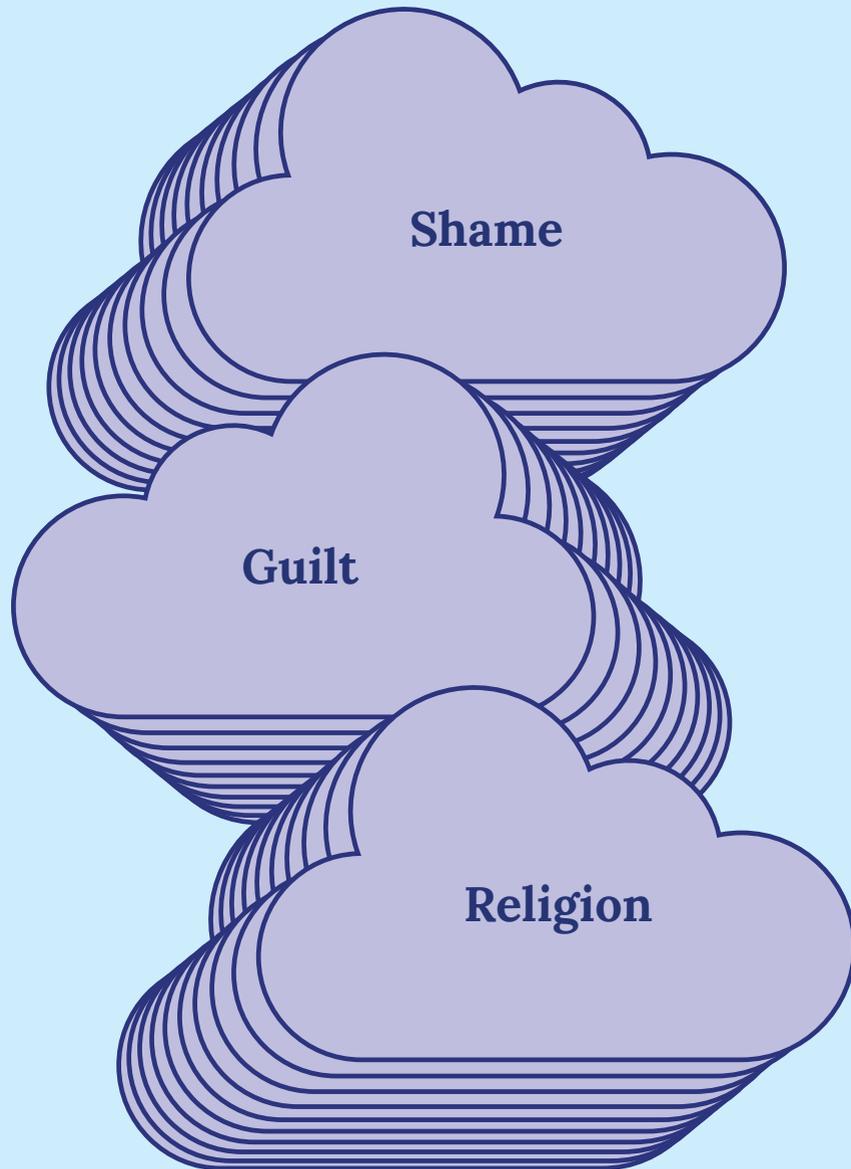


# Period and Culture



## Let's Talk About Shame

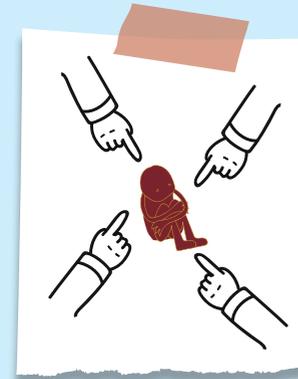
### What is shame?

Shame is a powerful emotion which comes from a fear of exposure and our flaws being seen, causing people to feel that your whole self is wrong, defective, unacceptable, or damaged.



### Why do we feel shameful?

When those around us have attitudes of devaluation or contempt towards us, when they treat us in a blaming fashion, and when we internalise the image and voice of a shaming person or parent, we become subject to a shame-based identity.



### Why does it happen and how does it differ from guilt?

Period shaming happens when an individual is shamed as a consequence of their periods, for example if someone has a blood leak which results in a visible blood stain on clothing. You may have been shamed for leaking or for talking about periods in the past, and it is important to understand where it comes from.

## Shame versus guilt

You may sometimes confuse shame with guilt because these two emotions have similarities, but they are different.

### Shame

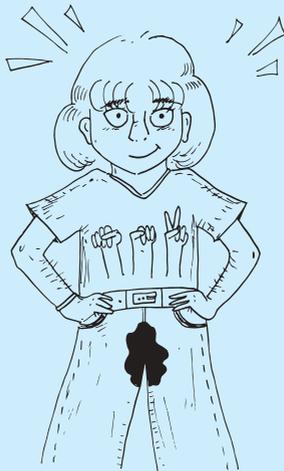
When you're feeling that your whole self is wrong.

### Guilt

When you're making a judgment that something you've done is wrong.

## How does shame start?

Your self-esteem is shaped by your daily experiences of being praised or criticised, lovingly disciplined or punished, and taken care of or neglected. You may become super sensitive to what feels like criticism (even if it isn't) and feel rejected by others. You might feel painful, self-contemptuous, and worthless. Intense feelings of shame can take hold of your self-image and create low self-esteem. Evidence is increasing that serious problems can occur, such as impacting your mental health, when the sense of shame gets deeply woven into a person's self-image and sense of self-worth.



## Break the cycle of shame

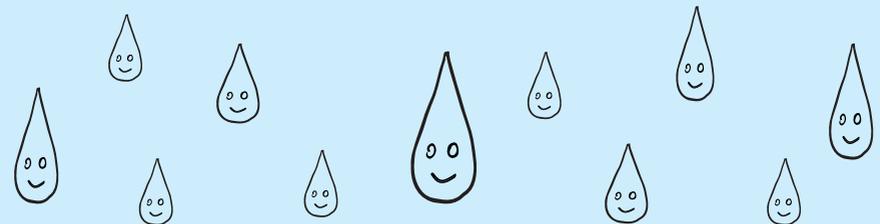
Learn to separate and evaluate whether you are ashamed or if someone else is shaming you. The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of the problem. In guilt, you are not the focus of the problem, but rather the thing done is the focus.

When you feel guilty about something wrong that you did, you can take steps to make up for it and put it behind. But when you feel ashamed, you feel convinced that you are the thing that is wrong, making it difficult to 'come back' to feeling more positive about yourself. Therefore, you must break the cycle of shame by not allowing period-shaming to define who you are and viewing your period and period stain as completely normal, which doesn't deserve any shame.

"THERE'S AN INTERESTING STORY WHERE THERE WAS ONCE A YOUNG GIRL WHO WAS TRAVELING WITH THE PROPHET MOHAMMED (PBUH) AND HIS FAMILY. SHE SAT ON A CAMEL AND HAD HER FIRST PERIOD AND STAINED THE SADDLE. SHE WAS QUITE ASHAMED BY THAT. BUT WHEN THE PROPHET HEARD ABOUT IT, HE SAID 'THERE'S NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF!' AND HE INSTRUCTED TO WASH AWAY THE STAINS AND JUST REUSE THE SAME SADDLE."

- IMAM AARIS ANWER (MUSLIM SCHOLAR)

**A period stain is not shameful. You are not impure. You are not dirty.**





# Question Corner



## A confidence building exercise

Let's say you're going to school and you're wearing your uniform. You don't know what a period is or you are still very new to having a period. Suddenly, a boy in your class asks you what that stain is on your trousers. A girl in your class gasps and tells everyone that you're bleeding. The toilet is too far away for you to quickly run to and people are starting to stare and whisper. You have period blood on your uniform, everyone is looking at you, and some of them start calling you "dirty". You feel ashamed and embarrassed.

**How would you react if this happened to you?**

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**How would you react if this happened to someone else? For example your friend or classmate.**

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**Why do you think some people would use the word "dirty" to describe period blood?**

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	<b>DEAR BIG SISTERS,</b>
	One time in middle school I wore white jeans (I know, yikes) and my period was early. In class I didn't know what had happened in those moments, but when I stood up from my chair to go answer a question on the chalkboard, it bled through the white pants and everyone was laughing. Now that I look back on this memory I was disappointed not only in the boys, but all the girls in my class who shamed another girl. Especially the female teacher who treated me like I had the plague. Like all those girls didn't go through the same every month.
	<b>SUBMISSION BY</b>
	<b>GIANNA ROSE, 20, UNITED STATES</b>



WE HAVE INTERVIEWED RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND SCHOLARS ABOUT MENSTRUATION. VISIT PERIOD AND CULTURE IN LEVEL 2 TO READ IT! - B.

# Periods and Religion

## Menstruation is not a punishment from God!

Here are a few examples of how menstruation is viewed within some religions. Whatever your belief or religion says about periods, always remember that it is a normal, natural, and biological process that half the world's population will experience at some point in their life.

**Islam:** The Quran says, "Her praying while pure is worship (ibada) and her refraining from prayer while menstruating is worship. All of it is worship".



**Buddhism:** "Menstruation is viewed as a natural physical excretion that women have to go through on a monthly basis, nothing more or less".



**Taoism:** Menstruation is referred to as a "Red Dragon".



**Sikhism:** The menstruation cycle is a God-given process. A woman's blood is necessary for human life and is therefore sacred, rather than impure.



**Christianity:** Sister Philotte Mukashema said, "For me, you cannot save the soul without saving the body."



**Judaism:** The Torah talks about menstruation in a very neutral way - neither positive nor negative. It is a unique spiritual time.



**Hinduism:** As a Hindu tradition, when a girl starts her period she's adorned and gifted. The idea is that the goddess is now coming into her form.





# Question Corner



**How are periods represented in your country, culture, and/or religion?**

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**Was there a time you felt religion or culture positivity impacted your experience of menstruation?**

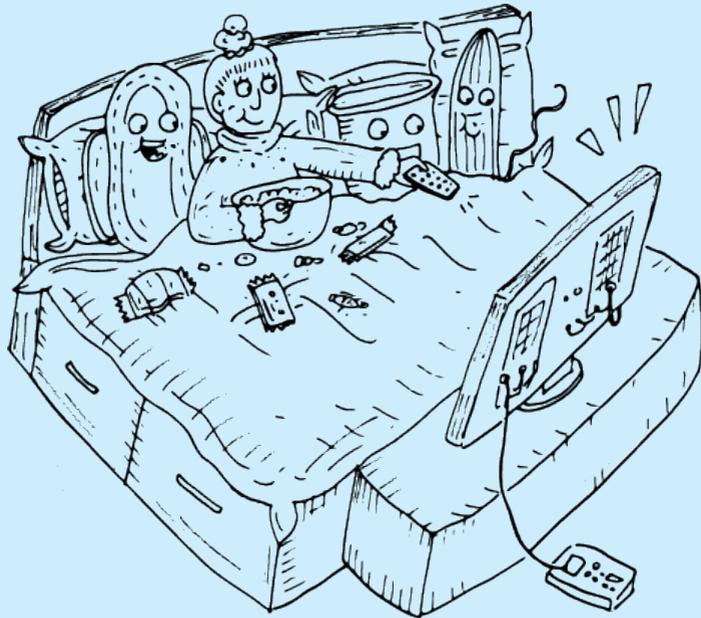
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**In some cultures, families and communities come together to celebrate a girl starting her period. Draw a scene at your ideal period celebration party!**

**DEAR BIG SISTERS,**

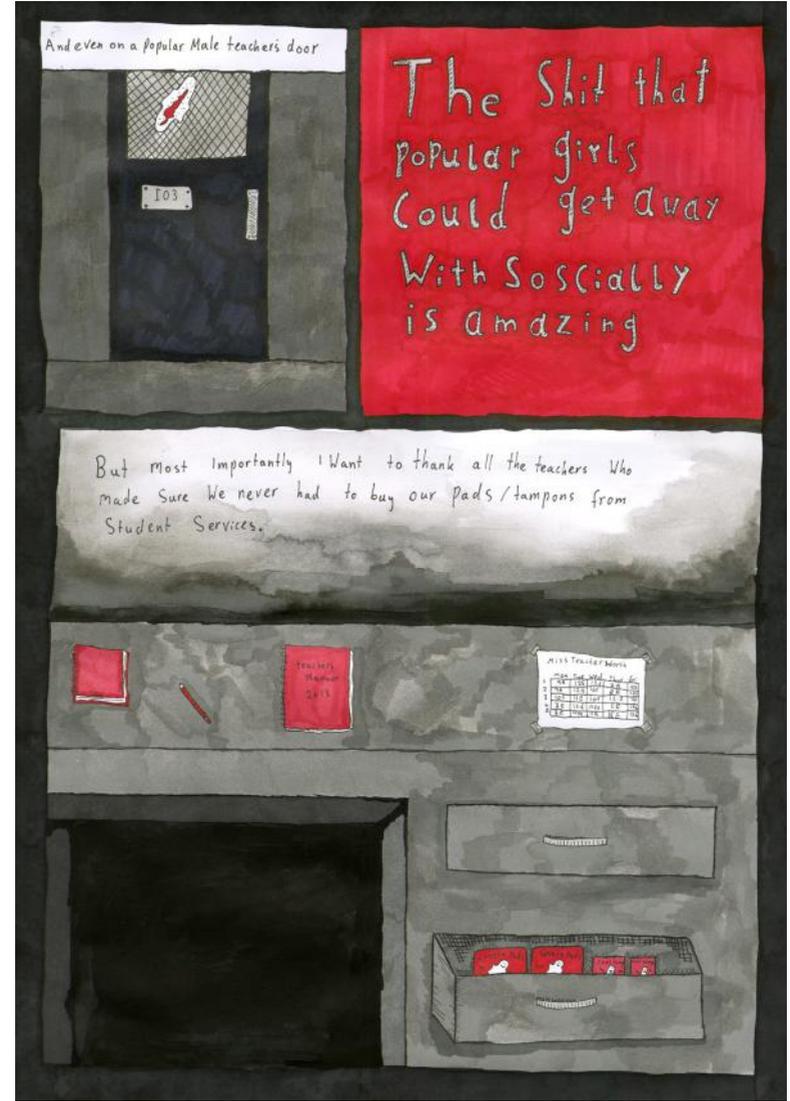
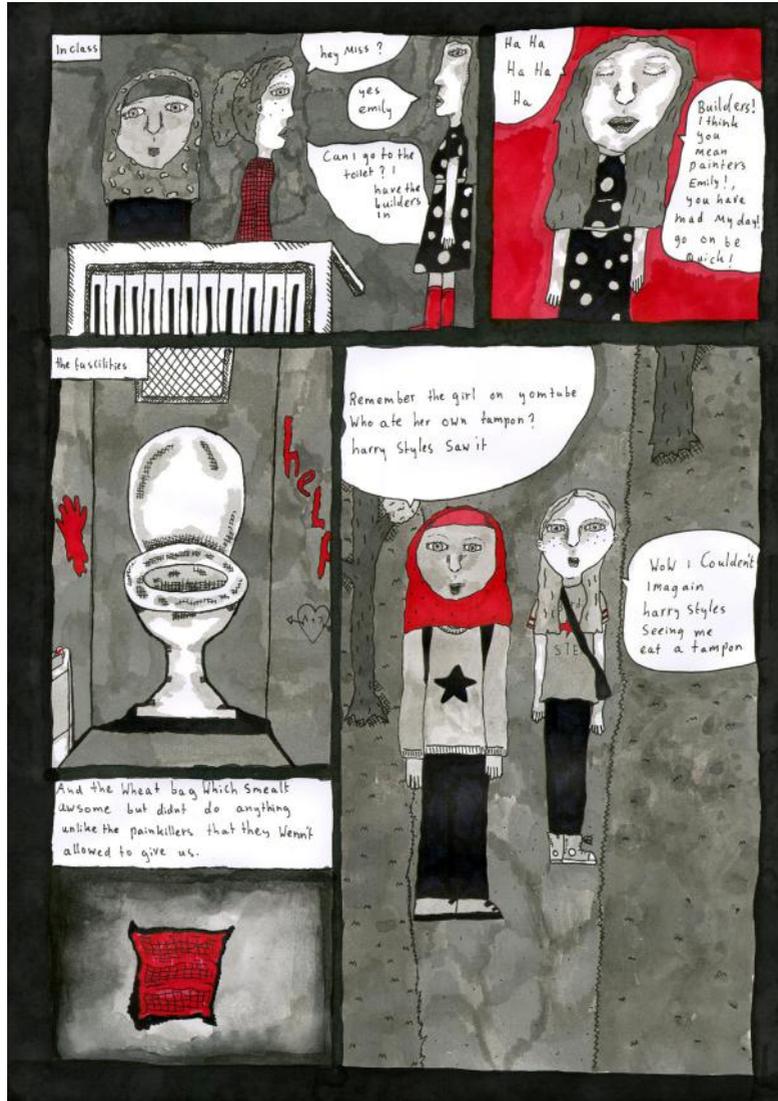
I was 11 years old in Beirut when I got my period. Luckily my mom and girlfriends had prepared me and I felt absolutely beautiful and grown up. I was a little worried about how to keep my pads hidden from my brothers and dad but I don't think I wasted too much time on that. I feel lucky that I was never shamed and my period made me feel empowered. Later on in life it became my favorite time of the month when I needed to use it as an excuse not to be intimate with my husband. I was unfortunately not very comfortable sexually and it certainly served me well to take breaks. I made my periods longer than they should have been.

**SUBMISSION BY  
HOURY, 58, LEBANON**



**DEAR BIG SISTERS,**





SUBMISSION BY EMILY BOWER, UK

# Your Period is Your Power

Periods are often associated with negative images in many religions and cultures. But let's look at some examples of myths and actual stories around the world and throughout history, in which periods are represented as something positive and powerful!



## Ancient Sumer

Ninhursag, the goddess of fertility in ancient Sumerian mythology, taught women to make clay dolls painted in period blood.

These dolls were then used for magic spells to help women to become pregnant.



## Borneo

Women from the Rungus tribe in Borneo have a neutral opinion about periods. They often see period blood, not as being clean or dirty, but simply as a fluid that must come out of your body on a monthly basis.



## Celtic Britain

According to the Celtic Britains, if you were stained red (which might be referring to period blood), it means you were chosen by the god. Also, the word for red in Celtic, ruadh, means royal.

## Hawaii

In ancient Hawaiian communities, having your period was seen as the most sacred time for women. They were also believed to have very strong spiritual powers that could even suck out the mana (or soul) of men.



## Ghana

Different countries and families have different ways to celebrate when a girl gets her first period. In some parts of Ghana, young girls are treated like queens and sit under a beautiful parasol decorated with flowers, while receiving gifts from family members.



## Native American

In Native American tradition, it is said that a woman has a powerful impact on Earth when she bleeds. The renewal of all your senses allows you to see the world with new eyes. This moment of epiphany, breadth and vision is completely yours.



## Ancient Rome

The Ancient Romans were told that women, while they are on their period are so powerful and magical that they can guard off natural disasters like hailstorms and lightnings. They were also believed to save crops in the field from beetles, worms, and caterpillars.



## Amazon

In the Tikuna tribe, some girls choose to be isolated for one year after their first period. During this year, they learn their own tribe's music, dances, history, and beliefs from female tribe members. They are welcomed back into the community with a 3 day Pelazón ceremony.

### Ancient Hopi

Hopi, a Native American tribe, believed that men would come back safely from war and the Earth would be peaceful if women on their period gave their blood to the soil of the earth.



### Ivory Coast

A religious leader of the Beng tribe in the Ivory Coast beautifully described period as the “flower of a tree”, because the tree (or girls) can’t nurture fruits (or babies) without the flower (or periods).



### Food for Thought

Many stories introduced in this section describe menstruation or menstrual blood as something sacred, powerful, and invincible. Some stories even mention that periods can be destructive, which might be the reason behind misconceptions like “women on their period must spend time in the menstrual hut”, “women can’t enter the kitchen when they are on their period because the blood can spoil the food”, or even “period blood is dirty and dangerous”. It is very important for us to understand the difference between myths and facts!



*"THERE ARE QUITE A FEW STORIES WHERE AISHA AND THE PROPHET WOULD OFTEN EAT FROM THE SAME PLATE AND DRINK FROM THE SAME CUP...SO THE TWO WOULD DO ALL THAT TOGETHER, IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER SHE WAS ON HER PERIOD. THERE WOULD BE WOMEN WHO WOULD COME AND ASK HER QUESTIONS ON HOW THEY SHOULD INTERACT WITH THEIR HUSBANDS [WHILE ON THEIR PERIOD]. AISHA IS THE ONE WHO'S LIBERATING THEIR MINDS BY SAYING, "NO, THIS IS HOW ME AND THE PROPHET WERE." EVERYTHING ELSE WE DID LIKE WE WOULD DO IN OTHER TIMES EXCEPT ACTUAL INTERCOURSE."*

- IMAM AARIJ, ISLAMIC SCHOLAR.



### Question Corner



**How are periods represented in your culture and/or religion?**

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**Was there a time you felt religion or culture positively impacted your experience of menstruation?**

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**In some cultures, families and communities come together to celebrate a girl starting her period. Draw a scene at your ideal period celebration party!**

**DEAR BIG SISTERS,**

When I was 13, I remember taking part in a Maths competition. The whole year was involved and it took place in the sports hall. I'd just finished doing some sort of sport so was still in my P.E. kit.

Our classes weren't very well integrated at my school, especially mine. I was in the top class, which they decided to push forward a year, and I barely knew anyone in my actual year group. This meant I was already freaked out when I found out this competition was mixed with the whole year, and I ended up being the only person from my class in my group. I remember everyone was relying on me to answer and the pressure was mounting. I then had that gut wrenching feeling that my period had started. Normally I wore thick tights at school and could trust that it wouldn't bleed through my clothes immediately, but my P.E. kit was a different story.

I spent the whole excruciating hour freaking out internally about my period. I couldn't leave to go to the toilet, I'd be letting down my teammates, so I just sat there for an hour, trying to concentrate enough to do a good job. When it was over, all I felt was fear. Everyone is going to see, everyone is going to know. When I eventually plucked up the courage to stand up, the smallest blood stain was on my shorts.

I still shuffled out panicking about what people would think, but in reality, no one noticed, and no one would have cared. Even writing this now I can feel the embarrassment and the redness in my face caused by something that should be totally normal.

**SUBMISSION BY  
ABBIE, 23, UK.**

**DEAR BIG SISTERS,**

Menstruate definitely the curse  
Every month nothing worse  
Nothing can be done  
Surely not for fun  
Twelve times a year  
Red is bound to appear  
Undergarments stained  
Absolutely drained  
Thousands of woman bear the pain  
Evolution has to go on  
It's the only gain.

**SUBMISSION BY  
HEATHER HILL, 51, DURHAM**