



BĪNAMĀZĪ

BĪNAMĀZĪ, NPers. “the state of being without prayer,” term for the state of a menstruant woman.

i. In Zoroastrianism.

ii. In Islam.

i. In Zoroastrianism

All bodily discharges are regarded by Zoroastrians as violations of the wholeness of the person, therefore the result of evil and ritually unclean; bloodshed is worse still, and menses, called a “mark” or “stain” (Av. *čīθravaitī-*, *daxštā-* “menstruant”; Pahl. *daštān*, Arm. *daštan*) is regarded as a periodic illness caused by Ahriman (*Bundahišn*, TD₂, p. 40.12-14; text and tr. in Zaehner, pp. 355-59). In *Zādspram* 34.31, Jēh-dēw, the demon Whore, is appointed by Ahriman for the defilement of females (*āhōgēnīdan ī mādagān*; see Zaehner, pp. 350-51). A woman in menses is subject to severe restrictions.

In the traditional Zoroastrian community of Šarīfābād-e Yazd, Iran, the *bīnamāz* woman is so called because she must remove *sudra* and *kustī* and may not pray. This is in contradiction to the *Persian Rivayats* (tr. Dhabhar, p. 214), which require that she tie the *kustī* seven times a day. She must withdraw to a place, usually a small, dark hut (Pahl. *daštānistān*, Arm. *daštanatun*) where her glance cannot strike, and thereby pollute, the seven



sacred creations of Ahura Mazdā. It must be fifteen paces from fire, water, and places of prayer; and three from places frequented by men. To have sex with a menstruant woman is one of the gravest sins a man can commit (*Vd.* 18 sets out terms of expiation). Despite the grim exactions of the observance, a girl's first menses is celebrated by her family as marking her entrance into womanhood; and there is no sense of guilt or original sin attaching to women, who are regarded as afflicted by Ahriman, as are even all the righteous in this age of Mixture (*Gumēzišn*).

The *bīnamāz* wears old, plain clothes and removes all adornments as soon as her period begins, lest they become permanently impure. She is allowed less food than usual—and no delicacies—and this is served in metal plates and taken with a metal spoon: other materials are porous and subject to pollution. She should wash with *nīrang* (consecrated bull's urine)

before eating, and is enjoined to wear special gloves. Any work she does while in confinement is washed with *gōmēz* (unconsecrated bull's urine) or with water from a bowl (not a running stream) before it can be used; so, also, are her garments for the period cleansed. Although Iranians wash thrice with water, the *Rivayats* forbid touching water for washing or letting even raindrops touch one in *bīnamāzī*.

The least period of *bīnamāzī* is three days, after which Iranians relax the rules of isolation somewhat. The period ends after a maximum of nine days, but normally seven. The menstrual flow must not be artificially stopped, and if it continues beyond nine days medical help is to be sought. One day after the day of the cessation of issue, the *bīnamāz* woman should wash with *gōmēz* and water over three *magas* (holes, from the *barašnom* ritual). If a woman has violated the rules of confinement, she is to pay for the performance of the ritual *dvāzdah hamāst* (twelve recitations of the *Vīdēvdād*, the Avestan text which treats of menstruation and purification in the greatest detail). Observance of the rules of *bīnamāzī* take precedence over other religious obligations: even if the menses begins when a woman is about to prepare a communal religious feast (*gāhāmbār*), she must withdraw, leaving the task to friends and neighbors. Iranian women sometimes forego traveling to a shrine of pilgrimage, lest their menses begin there and a grave sin of defilement be committed, thereby. But at the age when menstruation ends, some women will undergo the *barašnom-e nō šab* and spend the rest of their lives in absolute ritual purity, sometimes being appointed the caretakers of minor shrines.



In Bombay, pious Parsi Zoroastrian women of this writer's acquaintance will sleep on a metal cot apart from the family when menstruating; they eat out of metal vessels, sit on a special metal stool, and do not go to work. One remarked to me that the time was a rest from her hard life as a mother and housewife with a job downtown besides. Many urban Parsis have greatly reduced or abandoned the restrictions of menses.

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Šāyest nē šāyest, tr. Tavadia, chap. 3. *Vīdēvdād*, chaps, 16, 18.

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(James R. Russell)

ii. In Islam

In Islam the performance of ritual prayer (*namāz*) and certain other devotional acts are forbidden during *bīnamāzī*, the state or period of menstrual discharge (Ar. *ḥayḏ*). The only Koranic reference to the subject is found in 2:222, where menstruation is described as *aḍan* (lit. "harm"), a word understood to mean impurity in this context, and men are forbidden intercourse with their menstruating wives.

Under the general rubric of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) Islamic jurisprudence has given considerable attention to various aspects of menstruation, usually in conjunction with two other types of discharge—*esteḥāḏa* (all forms of



metrorrhagia other than menstruation) and *nefās* (lochial bleeding)—the three together being known as *al-demā' al-talāṭa* (the three bloods).

The different schools of Islamic law are in broad agreement on most matters pertaining to menstruation. The earliest age at which menstruation can begin is generally held to be nine, and some Shi'ite authorities (e.g., Ḳomeynī, 1359, p. 46) even specify that if a girl thought to be younger experiences a discharge exhibiting the characteristics of menstruation she must in fact have passed her ninth birthday. Shafe'ites allow for the possibility that menstruation may begin as early as seven. The age of menopause is set by Hanafites at 55 and left judiciously undetermined by Shafe'ites. Certain Shi'ite scholars (e.g., Ḳomeynī, 1359, p. 46) make a curious distinction between women that are *sayyeds* (descendants of the Prophet) and those that are not, fixing menopause for the former at sixty and for the latter at fifty (for a similar distinction between Qorayšī and non-Qorayšī women see Ḥellī, I, p. 29). The minimum length of menstrual discharge is said to be three consecutive days and the maximum, ten days; any metrorrhagia lasting between three and ten days is presumed to be menstrual, except in the case of a prepubescent girl or a woman (known technically as *ā'esa* or *yā'esa*) who has reached menopause. Bleeding that persists beyond ten days is reclassified on the eleventh day as *esteḥāza*. Despite the apparent rigidity, not to say artificiality, of these attempts at legally defining a biological phenomenon, some provision is made for irregularities in the beginning and duration of the menstrual period.

Menstruating women cannot perform any ritual prayers that require ablution, and the onset of menstruation while performing a prayer invalidates it. They may, however, engage in prayers, such as the funerary prayer (*namāz-e janāza*), that do not require ablution. Shi'ite writers recommend that at the time of prayer a menstruating woman should cleanse herself of blood, perform the minor ablution (*woḏū*), and sit where she customarily performs her prayers, facing the *qebla* and reciting various forms of supplication (*monājāt*) and petitionary prayer (*do'āṭawāf* (circumambulation of the Ka'ba),

Vaginal intercourse with a menstruating woman is forbidden; violation of this prohibition necessitates atonement on the part of the husband through an act of charity. Shi'ite *feqh* designates anal intercourse with a menstruating woman as extremely reprehensible but stops short of prohibiting it and does not call for atonement by the one who engages in it (Ḳomeynī, 1359, pp. 47-48). At the end of the menstrual period, the woman must perform a complete ablution (*ḡosl*) identical to that necessitated by sexual intercourse; it must, however, be



preceded by a minor ablution, which is not the case with the *gosl* that follows intercourse. The complete ablution is mandatory for the resumption of prayer and other ritual acts, but not for the renewal of marital relations.

Finally, the end of the menstrual period marks the beginning of the waiting time (*’edda*) that must elapse before a divorced or widowed woman can remarry.

For a summary of Sunni regulations, see ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān Jazīrī, *al-Feqh ‘ala’l-madāheb al-arba’a*, Cairo, n.d., I, pp. 123-30.

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