

Conscious Self-Care for Planetary Healing

Uma Dinsmore-Tuli and Cecilia Allon explain the innate connection between sacred activism and women's health

What has activism got to do with our health? Why is a well-rested woman a force for change? And what does your choice of tampons or sanitary towels have to do with activism? The answers to these questions depend upon what you think activism is.

If your image of an activist is a young woman superglued to railings, being dragged off to prison by the police, waving banners on a protest, signing petitions or making speeches, then think again.

Sacred activism can be a very private business. It can be about how often you choose to rest, or, yes, which tampons you buy. Sacred activism is rooted in a clear, practical sense of our physical connection to the earth and the responsibilities that brings.

A Sacred Connection
You may have heard the words Earth, my body; water, my blood; air, my breath, and fire, my spirit... This is not a metaphor. It's the reality: The Earth is a living planet and to live as a sacred activist means to acknowledge this reality every day.

The elements of which the Earth is made are the same constituent elements of all life on Earth. We are no different from anything else that lives and breathes on the planet. We are made from the Earth, live upon her and return to her, just like everything else around us. At a cellular level, every life form on the planet is made from the same ingredients as the planet herself. Traditional medicine systems such as Chinese medicine, Ayurveda and indigenous healing methods are all grounded in a recognition



treat the earth. Our bodies are living, breathing environments.

Womanhood is an ecosystem, and female bodies are all a part of it. Each and every woman on the planet is part of the ecosystem of womanhood. To practice sacred activism is to change our behaviour to reflect this connection. But how do we do this?

The Cyclical Relationship of Woman and Earth

The physiology of female bodies, in particular the female reproductive system, has a certain relationship with the Earth. How we choose to care for ourselves and how we care for our cycles of menstruation and our experiences of cyclical health – including our expression of our sexuality and our creativity, our pregnancies, our lactation and our menopausal experience – all of these have a very particular impact upon the Earth. Because menstrual cycles not only move in rhythm with lunar and seasonal cycles, they also produce blood which goes back to the Earth – to enrich her or pollute her, depending upon how we choose to dispose of our blood. Choices we make about how we handle our energies, how we handle our blood, how we handle our bodily fluids (and those of our babies, if we have them) – these functions can all cause pollution, damaging our planet.

This is the direct and simple connection between self-care choices for women's health and planetary health. This is the link between women's wellbeing and environmental activism. It's so simple. How you choose to handle the physiology of your own little piece of the vast ecosystem of woman-

hood makes a massive difference to global environmental health.

First up, let's talk about environmental health... This is a big word that helpfully brings together two big ideas. It is a combination of the words environment and menstruality. Menstruality means the rhythmic cycles of women's lives – not just menstruation but also our menarche (our first period), our menopause (the cessation of our periods) and our mature years.

Every month those of us with periods expose our bodies to toxic chemicals, and have to bin or flush plastic due to the unhealthy disposable menstrual products we are sold. This is not helped by a lack of impartial education and the taboos that exist around periods. Sadly, 58% of women say they have felt embarrassed simply because they are on their period.

The Facts and Figures

The average menstruator uses 11,000 disposable menstrual products in their lifetime, and their disposal generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year in Britain alone. In fact, a stunning 2 billion menstrual products are flushed down Britain's toilets each year. 41% of women admit to flushing these products down the loo, contributing to the sewer blockages which cause pollution on our beaches and in our oceans, and problems on their journey to our beaches as well. There are approximately 370,000 sewer blockages throughout the UK every year, of which up to 80% are caused by the combination of fats, oils and grease with wet wipes, sanitary waste and other unflushable items.

Disposal menstrual pads contain up to 90% plastic – an average pack contains the same amount of plastic as five plastic bags. This plastic takes 500-800 years to degrade, but the thing about plastic is that it never goes away, instead breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces. The microplastics that we now find on our beaches and in the ocean remain in our ecosystem, harming thousands of sea creatures every day.

For every 100 metres of beach that is cleaned in Britain, 4.8 pieces of menstrual waste are found. In the United Kingdom the removal of single-use menstrual

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products, wet wipes and other related debris from beaches is estimated to cost about £1 million annually.

Some menstrual products also include fragrances which can interfere with the balance of bacteria inside your body. Synthetic fragrances can be made from a cocktail of up to 3,900 chemicals (styrene, chloromethane, chloroethane, chloroform and acetone are just some of the chemicals used). Some of these chemicals are identified as carcinogens, neurotoxins, irritants, hormone disruptors and reproductive toxicants. However, most of the time these chemicals are not disclosed on the product by the manufacturer.

Many of the conventional single-use menstrual products (i.e. sanitary pads and tampons) and their packaging contain plastic and other synthetic materials like rayon, adhesives, artificial fragrances and toxic chemicals such as phthalates, bisphenol-A and petrochemical additives, which are recognised environmental pollutants and are also known to be endocrine-disrupting substances linked to some diseases, such as heart disease, infertility and cancer. Even traces of dioxin, which is created when these products are bleached white for visual appeal, and pesticides and herbicides, including glyphosate, can be found in menstrual products. »



What Can We Do About It?

- Be sure to only flush your own waste and toilet paper
- Switch to plastic-free and organic cotton disposable options
- Switch to a reusable menstrual product like a menstrual cup, period pants or washable pads

Taking these simple, practical steps is the best way to make sacred activism part of your own intimate self-care. But it's not just about blood. It's also about energy, and respecting our own rhythmic cycles of recovery and recuperation. Like an overfished sea, the ecosystem of womanhood has been depleted. Women simply don't have any more to give.

This is energetic ecocide. Just as homicide is murder of a human, ecocide is murder of the planet: an action that causes the death of an environment or the extinction of a species. In the same way that pollution, deforestation and over-hunting destroy the earth's environment, so too does the punishing work schedules and sleep-deprivation that are part and parcel of many women's lives, eroding our vitality and wellbeing.

Our energy is not a limitless resource to be exploited. Our ability to create is cyclical, not perpetual. When we exploit our own vital energies and capacities to give and to do, we push ourselves beyond the limit of what is natural or sustainable. This too is a kind of ecocide. In the same way that open-cast mines, fracking companies and the corporations that lay oil pipelines through sacred territories or extract uranium from holy ancestral sanctuaries destroy external environments, so too can we sabotage the delicate ecosystems of our own physical and internal energetic environments.

If you have ever pushed through exhaustion with another coffee, or refused to listen to the signs that your body gave you when you were getting sick or depleted, know that this too damages the ecosystem of womanhood.

A powerful act of sacred activism is to take rest. To push back against the culture of non-stop work that has all our noses to the grindstone: this is also sacred activism. To refuse to be part of this culture is revolutionary, and the first step in the revolution is to get horizontal. Next time

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you are tired, see how it feels to respond with kindness – to stop and rest, or to listen to a yoga nidra practice. Yoga nidra, literally meaning 'yoga sleep' is a perfect antidote to exhaustion. It restores and nourishes the capacity of your body to listen to its own rhythmic cycles, and offers a reset rooted in an understanding of the connection between the body and the earth – both move in cycles to be respected. As a daily practice, this can be key to sustainable energy management.

Many traditional activists burn out, but a sacred activist puts self-care as a top priority. In caring for ourselves we can be better campaigners and activists. Yoga nidra is a key tool in the campaign 'Yoni Shakti: the Movement' to eradicate the abuse of women in yoga and to reclaim it as a tool for healing and justice. Campaign supporters are gifted specially-created yoga nidra tools to nourish, to connect to Source and to build a sense of connection amongst the community of activists. This is a new kind of activism – one powered by well-rested women.

We cannot do this alone, sisters. When we work together, rest together, and choose to educate and inform others about the choices we make, this is sacred activism – every bit as much of a protest as gluing yourself to the Houses of Parliament, marching or signing a petition.

A well-rested woman is a revolutionary force. Environmentally-conscious choices can save the planet, and taking a nap is a radical act of resistance. All these self-care tools are part of the Sacred Activists' toolkit for self-nurture

and planetary healing. How we care for ourselves and how we care for our planet are one and the same. Holistic women's health is planetary healing and environmental recovery. •

- ✦ Cecilia Allon is Environmental Ambassador for the Women's Environmental Network.
- ✦ Environmental Ambassadors work nationwide to bring period education to schools, universities, community groups and workplaces. Find out more at www.enw.org.uk/our-work/environmental
- ✦ Uma Dinsmore-Tuli is author of *Yoni Shakti: A Woman's Guide to Power and Freedom through Yoga and Tantra* (£25, available from yonishakti.co/shop)
- ✦ For practical yoga therapy and free yoga nidra to support your wellbeing, check out yonishakti.co and yoganidranetwork.org
- ✦ To sign up to the Yoni Shakti the Movement Campaign, visit yonishaktithemovement.com

nexus@ukoffice.u-net.com www.nexusmagazine.com'."/>