

(introductory music)

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**MARYN:** Welcome to Indie Birth's series of podcasts here on iTunes, *Taking Back Birth*. Hi, Maryn here wanting to talk and chat today about where and how women lose their power. In birth, of course, is always comes to mind for me at first. And it's something I think a lot about and probably something you think a lot about too. Just how did we get where we are? What can do to help women find that voice inside of them that connects them to much of this deeper knowledge? A lot of it we do talk about here on the podcasts. But I always say—and I still stand by—it's knowledge that all of us have whether it's birth or mothering. I think it's inside of everyone.

So more specifically, although I was going down the path of where women lose this power in birth—before I began preparing today, we're going to talk about something called the blood mysteries. Now I didn't either until very recently that this was actually a thing to read about or to learn about by that name. But it certainly is a topic that is near and dear to me just as birth is. So the five blood mysteries of womanhood are natural physiological processes, and birth is one of those. So other than that, in order, we would first begin our lives with our own births, of course, which is the first blood mystery. The second is menarche or our first bleeding. The third is pregnancy and birth. The fourth is menopause. And the fifth is death. So perhaps you're wondering what this all means or has to do with each other. I'm going to get there little by little.

So the blood mysteries are essentially ancient understandings. I guess I could say teachings as well although the origins of these teachings are unclear. We know that for the most part many and most ancient societies were women led, were women run, were matriarchal societies, not patriarchal as we have today. And so these teachings, again, aren't attributed to a specific person funny enough. So much in the patriarchal society will be named after a man, right? I was thinking on other terms today like Braxton-Hicks contractions or whatever it is. Not so much in the matriarchal society, which again, at this point, is really a thing of the past. So the five blood mysteries are teachings or perhaps an understanding that women had, and I think we need to come back to. But they are basically the markings throughout our lives that beg for ritual, that beg for remembering and delving into the sacred nature. And we're going to talk more about why today and how these blood mysteries do influence where we are with birth and perhaps what we could maybe do about that.

So just for fun, I thought you might like to hear how I got going down this rabbit hole. And yes. I've already been interested lately in the sacred moon cycle. I have another

podcast on that. And my daughters are coming up probably soon on their own first moon time. So I have lots of personal interest in that topic. But what really got me going down this hole today was thinking more about fear in birth and specifically fear in the postpartum period about bleeding after birth. What is it about blood that is so scary to people, to women and men? Why are we so scared of blood even in a normal birth, right? Normal situation. A placenta has to come out. The woman will bleed. That's, again, one of the mysteries. And there's nothing wrong with her. And then, of course, you could go down other little holes and wonder why we're so scared of death, why we're so scared of bleeding that comes with loss, miscarriage, and just kind of repeat these themes throughout so many rites of passage that women go through. That they, instead of being surrounded with mystery as they were in the past and as they were taught to be, are now surrounded in fear.

So that's how I got going down this today. I have kind of a little tidbit from an Elizabeth Davis book, and you can Google the name of her book. I don't have it written here. But she is a midwife or was a midwife at least and wrote a book about cycles and partly this blood mystery teaching. So she's says, "The origins of the teachings are unclear. Perhaps this is because the word mystery is defined as truth that is unknowable except by divine revelation. The only way to trace this truth back is through the rosy glow of our own divine wombs following that sweet hum all the way to the holy matrix of the great cosmic womb. Every single culture has woven a similar thread from these truths telling of the sacredness of woman's blood and humanity, which was birth from these waters. Often held in fear and reverence, the blood that not only comes without wounding but also creates life."

So again, for me, it was knowing some of these things and believing them and thinking about them but, again, having this light bulb moment where it was very easily connected with birth for me and why there is so much fear and also shame around birth and even loss. So the mysteries, all of the five as mentioned already, as seen by the patriarchal society that we live in—they are seen as unclean and shameful, if they are even recognized at all. So I ask you to just sit with that for a moment. And it might be a lot longer than a moment. You may choose to do some serious self reflection on that as it translates into your life and your experience. Whether or not you've birthed doesn't really matter. Certainly, you were born, and sometimes there's even shame around those stories that we know about ourselves. Certainly, our first bleeding, our first moon cycles, many of us have feelings or stories that communicate the patriarchal view because that's what we know.

So as I just said, many or most of the time these blood mysteries are not even recognized in this society we live in. So I guess if I had to choose seeing one of them as shameful or some of these other negative connotations isn't the best, and we certainly want to change that. And we can work to change that, I believe, together as women that

have this knowledge. But not even recognizing the mysteries for being mysteries and for being something that deserves our attention, I think, is the biggest tragedy of all. But of course, that is what we are being asked to do in the society that we live in. So the cultural denial of our blood, again, whether it's at moon time, whether it's at birth, whether it's with loss, has been around for as long as the patriarchal model has won and taken over. Male dominated cultures all over the world are the same in that they don't want us to see or have this wisdom. And I think it's possible they don't even have the knowledge either in this modern day. I'm not sure that many men have even taken half a second to think about women's cycles or ritual or anything like that.

So I don't think it's even a conscious domination or not wanting us to see. It's just really part of our culture where, again, we've been denied the sacred nature of these mysteries and the mysteries themselves, which as I said I think is more upsetting than anything. So you can think of all the examples you know about how this looks in this world. There are so many that I could go on and on. Just a few to spark your own creativity. Something like birth control, even something like tampons. Of course, we could talk more in detail about those things being choices and yada, yada, yada, but really it is in the effort to deny what's actually going on. Those things. So again, there's many more example. And when we talk a little bit later about birth and maybe how this affects birth, then perhaps it'll make even more sense.

So one really cool thing that came up—and I don't think this is something that we don't know. But how consciously have you thought about this? That it is amazing that as women we can bleed when nothing is wrong with us. Like we're not sick. We're not injured. Most of us have taken that for granted our whole lives. In fact, monthly bleeding for most and many women is a complete nuisance. It's embarrassing. It's shameful. But what if just for a moment you stepped back and you saw this mystery for being what it is which is amazing and wondrous? Again, that we could bleed with no injury. So many of the mysteries or really all of them, I guess, because they are called the blood mysteries are examples of this. Even in death, which is a normal process and part of human life, part of life in general, does not mean that we are injured, per se. When we bleed after birth. Again, when we bleed with miscarriage or loss, it's a normal process. We're not dying. And we're not injured.

So to men, imagine what that may have looked like in ancient times before there was scientific knowledge about the way these things work. This was one of the reasons that women were so revered. That really the matriarchal societies were set up that way because women held and still do this incredible power that men knew they couldn't compete with. And the blood and the mysteries of the blood was one of the main reasons. So men were confounded. How does this happen? How can a woman bleed and be okay? So women were seen as magic. And I think that's still a really awesome kind of thing to hold especially when you are bleeding each month. That this is a magic

time. That you are doing something special and sacred. And to work to see that magic if you don't feel it.

So anyway, that was a huge thing. And in turn, that power, that magic power that all women have has become a huge threat to the patriarchy. So let's review or maybe go through why blood is so powerful. Just kind of think about it. And powerful might mean that it can feel scary as you're revisiting your own feelings about these things and maybe trying to change your perception. Why is the sight of blood so powerful? Why is the thought of it so powerful? What does it mean to us and why? And how much of what we believe is something deeper than wisdom? And how much is cultural fears that have been put on us? So blood is powerful. And it is for a couple of reasons. As women, it's obviously our own personal power to give life, right? So our cycle starts with bleeding. And that cycle is preparing the womb or the uterus for life. That is why we are shedding that lining and bleeding.

So it's life really at its utmost simplest form. Blood is life. So if blood is life and blood flows from the uterus, then the uterus is a sacred temple because life is sacred. And all societies and all cultures, I think, across the board regardless of religion and all of that agree that life is sacred. So it only makes sense that our bodies would also be sacred. And that's a really huge thing to even consider yourself in that way, right? Especially when, as we talk about birth, women are so hurt and violated and damaged and abused and all of these things. That the uterus really is a sacred temple. So blood, especially menstrual blood, is life giving. So many people, even now which is awesome to hear, there are women that are giving their blood back to the earth during their time of bleeding. It's something you can totally try out for yourself. But it is really nourishing for the land, for the plants, and there are healing stem cells in menstrual blood that, again, make it a really powerful substance.

And like I said, the scientific knowledge, obviously, wasn't there in ancient times, but I don't think that mattered. They probably had more of a reverence for it than we do even with scientific knowledge. They knew that it was a life giving thing, for lack of a better word. So blood is also powerful because during this time of monthly bleeding women were known to be super powerful and actually clairvoyant and connected to almost another dimension or realm. Now if that was true then, there is no reason that isn't true now except that we don't know. And we don't practice that, and we don't maybe believe that. Or we don't take advantage of that or whatever it is. But that is how it was, and that was the knowledge that everyone had. That when women went away to the red tent or wherever they went together to bleed that they were the most connected, that the tribe or culture they were with trusted them to come back with valuable information whether it be about crops or solutions to a problem, visions, anything like that.

So, again, it wasn't just the women that thought they were powerful. They were respected and honored by the entire tribe or village or whatever it was for being super special during this time. So there were rituals and rites to protect the passage of menarche, which is the first bleeding. And really every bleeding. There, just depending on the culture, could be simple rituals every month to honor this time. But all of the five blood mysteries were honored. And, of course, that's a huge topic to delve into how that looked in different cultures. But just to be simple and brief about it, from the time we were born to the time we died, everything that marked those times and in between was seen as something to honor and to have prayer about or ritual or whatever it was that this specific culture would come up with.

And the idea behind doing that was, again, not just for the women to feel super special even though they were. But it was for the whole entire culture, the whole entire village, to protect their women and basically take care of this asset because they really, really needed the women's vision and wisdom. And that is how the society ran successfully. So it was self serving in that way, wanting to protect that which was valuable to the whole entire culture. So how different are we now, right? How backwards have we gotten it? And I'm not imagining really that we're going to bring down the patriarchy in our lifetimes. But I don't think that's even the point. I think first women need to hear this and realize where they came from and what they have inside of them and what their lineage is regardless of where you came from or what culture it was or what country it was. If you're a woman, you have this in your heritage. And that really hasn't changed. We just live in a time where that's ignored. But how amazing is that? I kind of just can't ever fully appreciate it in a way or fully digest it in a way that women were treated so differently and that their bodies and the normal functions of their bodies were honored.

And I'm not different than anyone else even though here I am talking. It's amazing to me to think that maybe I could change this for my daughters because I certainly didn't grow up this way. And these are ideas that I deeply, deeply feel as my truth. But yes. I didn't practice them in my earlier years before getting pregnant and having babies myself. So I almost feel like I haven't had enough time in my life with probably the number of years I have left bleeding every month to really, really find myself there. But I think anything we can do is worth it. And we'll talk more about that maybe as we're wrapping this up. But little tidbit that I thought was fun. The word ritual comes from *ritu*, which is Sanskrit for menses. So interesting. Ritual. Menses. That those words were intertwined. The blood from the womb which nourished the unborn child was believed to have mana, or breath of life.

So, again, just little tidbits to illustrate that in ancient times or much older times every aspect of being a woman body, mind, and soul was honored and that specifically the blood of life was completely revered. So just can't get enough of that. so let's see. If bleeding is sacred—and again our bodies are sacred and these five blood mysteries are

part of being a woman just normally but they are times of intense connection or spiritual growth, you could really take this in a lot of different directions as to how deep you want to go and why this is so important. But it's essentially our power, so that's how I started the podcast off. And that is why that these five mysteries represent our power. This is who we are at a cellular, deep, deep level. Again, an ancestral level.

And repressing this power is hurtful for ourselves. So I think that's really something to sit with, right? Because it's not just about blaming the times we live in and the patriarchal this and that. We are repressing our own power, and we are hurting ourselves physically and emotionally. And I really, really do feel and see that that's the bind we're in with birth. That's why there is no magic pill. That's why there's no magical fact or study or this or that that can convince women to birth undisturbed or as their bodies know to because the repression of power is so deep and it's so strong. And it's mostly that we've done it to ourselves. And not for horrible reasons or not for good reason. In other words, not to say it's really anyone's fault. This is just where we are. And I think the best we can do at this point is just find that place again.

So this reminded me that when I was in Canada this summer or this past summer one of the women there, Shannon—very lovely woman—did a moon circle kind of thing. And so there were lots of women there. And if I'm remembering correctly, Shannon's question to all the women—and I was in the circle as well—was something about remembering our first moon time. And again, these were women or are women that are empowered. And many of them have had lovely births and home births and some were midwives. And, again, kind of the cream of the crop as far as powerful women go, I thought. And almost everybody in the circle had not the most positive experience to share about her first moon time.

So all to say that we have a lot of ground to cover with the daughters and generations that follow us because we're, I think, only just really scratching the surface by getting back to this knowledge. So, again, I think when we're talking about birth—and I do want to talk about birth a little bit—this is why it's so weird to just talk about birth and to expect people to really change themselves and their decisions that severely just based on a conversation of birth because we're not really able to do more than scratch the surface, if we're not able to reach them about birth which they may or may not even really know about yet. Then they're unreachable. Their whole lives have been spent this way, so most, if not all women, that are pregnant have had bleeding times, right? I mean how else could it really work. So they've had this opportunity unknowingly to connect with these sacred mysteries. And winding up in the middle of it, which pregnancy and birth really is, right? I think it's the third mystery. You really are smack in the middle. There hasn't been any understanding or growth.

So, anyway, some days that makes me feel better. Some days that makes me feel worse as far as why we are the way we are. But I think for those of us that are willing to do the work and to get to a place where we're able to communicate this to more people and more women than we have to understand where we came from. And, again, birth just isn't good enough. So birth is a blood mystery, of course, as we said. But just was kind of brainstorming reasons why it's not seen that way and what the patriarchy has done to it. But that is just so incredible to me as well. So many of these things today that are feeling really monumental to my brain and to my heart. That birth is a blood mystery. So in this world we live in, it's not seen as powerful but fearful much like the other mysteries. It's dirty and shameful. And I think that's definitely where we're at with birth in the mainstream culture. Birth is gross. Post a photo of birth on Facebook and trust me. If you have enough people viewing your content as we do, yes. You will nicely get your fair share of pleasant comments. But you will also get absolutely horrific, uneducated, detached, disconnected, mean, hateful comments because birth is shameful and it's disgusting. And that is something that I am very passionate about changing.

So at its worst, it's not even seen, as I said earlier. Kind of the worst possibility is that we don't even talk about birth anymore, right? If we get to the point where birth doesn't even happen anymore. Everybody is an automatic surgery. That could totally happen. So birth has had all the sacredness removed from it just like the rest of the mysteries. The knowledge has been suppressed. The knowing has been suppressed. The need for ritual or connection as part of the process has been obliterated. And that's something I know is personal as much of this is. Maybe even depending on religious or spiritual beliefs. But I don't think there is one way it needs to look. So when I say ritual about any of these things, I think that's what it means to you and how you want to celebrate it in the life that you're living. So celebration honoring that change is happening. That's what ritual is.

So I think that's really important in birth. I don't think that means that every single woman across the board has to view birth as a spiritual experience or something that deserves ritual. But I think we definitely need to be having those discussions more so that women know that's not some woo woo, crazy, hippy, New Age concept. This is an ancient rite of passage for as long as women have been birthing. And if we add that back in to our understanding of birth and, of course, our understanding of bleeding and all of that then we have a better chance of finding our power.

So the other part that I kind of mentioned about blood in birth and blood as a birth—or birth as a blood mystery—got that backwards—is blood is seen in modern day life as chaos. That was the best word I could come up with. But then I thought it was actually pretty good because blood, again, in birth or, like I've said several times in loss, we feel a need to control that. Now right. I could go down the clinical midwife path and say, "Well, of course, we need to control it. We don't want someone to bleed to death and all

that.” But that’s not really what I’m talking about. I’m talking about a normal situation, a normal birth, a normal live birth or a normal miscarriage that these processes do included blood. They do. That’s just the way it will always be. And there’s nothing wrong with that.

So it’s constantly mistaking what’s normal for something pathological which of course is sort of a male thing to do really. I don’t think when we’re connected to our deepest selves that clinical knowledge is the first place to go honestly. I don’t think that most women would or do even as midwives. So I’m saying that I don’t think you need clinical knowledge if you’re sitting with someone and they’re birthing or maybe they’re miscarrying. I think most women, again, when they’re connected would know if the bleeding was normal and part of this mystery and life giving process or death process or if there was truly something wrong. But our focus on there being something wrong when there is bleeding is so overdone. And I could probably go down that rabbit hole or stand on that soapbox—however you want to say it—for quite a long time because that’s just where so much has gone wrong in even the natural birthing world, the women that are birthing at home with midwives, the midwives themselves. Blood is chaos. It needs to be controlled. We have medications. We have all of these things to control what is often normal. And not only that but the emphasis is so heavily on the pathology instead of on everything we’ve talked about today.

So maybe I’m the crazy one. But what if midwives and mothers and aunts and—et cetera—were having these kind of conversations with their daughters and their clients and talking more about how they feel about things? Honestly, as silly as it sounds, a woman that has been shameful about her periods her whole life—maybe she’s even had lots of pain and physical issues around bleeding every month—I read somewhere—I don’t know where now. I think there was a study done that basically when women felt shameful about their cycles that they were likely to experience more pain which I don’t think is rocket science. But if we’re talking about those things even with clients that we have or daughters, then maybe we wouldn’t need to have this pathology—pathologic—is that a word? Focus on birth all the time because we can’t even seem to talk about things like miscarriage anymore or postpartum hemorrhage without talking so much about the fear and the—being scared and how many stories do you hear—maybe I hear more than most but—on a given week about bleeding too much after birth or even after a miscarriage?

And, again, I’m not saying that doesn’t happen. But why is that our focus? Why have we lost the focus on the mysteries? Why have we—why do we not even know that the five blood mysteries is a thing to know? That’s very disturbing as women. We have just no excuse in a lot of ways to not know that. We’ve totally sided with the patriarchy. We’ve really taken up these beliefs that our bodies are shameful and they don’t work and they



need to be controlled. And until we really, really get to the root of that and start to believe otherwise, it's going to be hard to shift practices especially birth practices.

So I think you probably are developing lots of your own ideas, hopefully, as you've listened today. I know I have about some local ideas I want to implement and, again, even with my own daughters. But how can we remember the mystery? I think that's the million dollar question that we could have started with really. That's the most important thing. It's not about teaching about postpartum hemorrhage. It's not about all of these other things. Really it's how can we remember the mystery? How can we acknowledge the five blood mysteries that take us from life to death? And how can we remember the inherent literal mystery in each of those life events especially birth? Since that's mainly what we talk about here.

So a couple of ideas. I think we need to learn more ourselves as I'm doing, as you're doing by listening to this. There's a lot of great resources out there. Really you could just Google moon cycle or even sacred blood mysteries. There's a couple resources and books that come up. Just learning all you can. And then connecting that with your heart, I think, is the most important. So not just having this intellectual knowledge but feeling into what this means for you. And, again, that's how I got started with this podcast today. Just kind of feeling into why some of these things feel like an issue.

So what are your beliefs about bleeding, right? What were your own experiences growing up or with your own births or miscarriages or maybe you're in menopause or who knows what? But certainly, you've encountered some or all of—not all. Certainly, not the last one which is death. But certainly, you've encountered a few of the blood mysteries in your life. How does your religion or spiritual beliefs kind of flow with what you've learned and what you know deep down? So how many of these things that you feel or can identify are really you? That's a huge personal journey there. I think a lot of what you'll find when you're reflecting is that many of the feelings or beliefs even that you have aren't actually you. They're cultural, and they've been put upon you by how we live today. So the shame in bleeding, I think, is a huge one. Feeling weird when you have to go to the store and buy pads or whatever it is. Something as silly as that. How are you dealing with this in your life?

So those are some simple examples. I think some deeper exploration we can all benefit from by when we are bleeding or—that's probably the easiest example. But when we finding ways to accept the power in that, and that's a huge thing, if you've grown up feeling shameful and dirty like it's something you have to hide. How do you in your own way, in your own comfort level with where you are right now, accept that there is power and life in the blood and that it is pretty much the opposite of everything you've ever been taught? So breaking that mold, I think, is just huge. Doing that for ourselves and starting to do that with our daughters. Can you imagine when they're growing up or as

they're growing up right now that they could leave that behind? That that's possible for them to not feel weird or gross or like it's taboo to be bleeding. And even more so to realize at a young age what power that is for them and how special it is and how lucky they are. And, again, however they want to honor that in exploring that with them whether it's ceremony or ritual or just going out to dinner. It doesn't have to be anything super crazy or creative to give honor and sacredness to these times.

So I hope this has been some food for thought. I know I've enjoyed doing a little research here on the five blood mysteries. I'd love to hear your thoughts and always how you feel they can relate to our teachings on birth that we're all actively putting out there and any other ideas you have for your community or anything else that could help us all reconnect to this knowledge. Thanks again for listening. Check out the Indie Birth site for more content. [indiebirth.com/podcastarchives](http://indiebirth.com/podcastarchives) is where all of the archives, all of the podcasts are. Our Wise Woman Circle is [indiebirth.com/circle](http://indiebirth.com/circle). This is a hundred plus member circle growing every day. These members are midwives and students and doulas and just women that want to learn. And we have phone calls every month from experts all over the world that are sharing their knowledge in a really laid back, easy to digest way. So nothing fancy, just listen at home and learn. And that's the goal for everyone.

So thanks again. Have a great day.

(closing music)