



**RED
TENT**
Sacred Space
for Women

The Red Tent Revival

HOW WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD ARE RECLAIMING THE SACRED

It all started with a book. A novel by Anita Diamant, published in 1997, tells an expanded version of the biblical story of Dinah, daughter of Jacob and sister of Joseph. The title of the book, *The Red Tent*, refers to the actual tent in which women would seek comfort and refuge while on their menstrual cycle and while giving birth. In the tent, each month, they found connection, support, and encouragement from other women in their extended families.

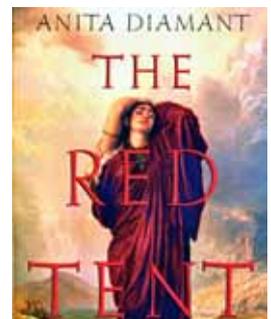
For many of us who read the book it was a touching story about a time long gone; a wistful and historical peek into a culture more intact and slower paced than our own. For those of us leading and participating in women's circles, the book was an affirmation of vision and intention — a shout of support through the ages.

And for some women, it has inspired a movement.

The movement is celebrating nearly five years and spreading robustly. Alisa Starkweather, is the founder of the Red Tent Temple Movement. She says this of the movement, “We are creating now in our local communities a place for us where we can meet each other and at the very same time take care of ourselves and one another. The Red Tent Temple Movement raises up a Red Tent in our local villages, cities and towns for us to honor our blood cycles and womanhood journeys.”

Another major leader in this movement is Jasmin Starrchild, creator of the Red Moon Medicine Movement, which is dedicated to helping women reclaim their menstrual cycle as sacred. Jasmin, who lives in Vancouver and teaches on the West Coast encourages women to ritualize their monthly menstruation. “Each year we have thirteen opportunities to enter ceremony, as most women will menstruate or bleed 13 times in a solar year.” She stresses, “It is ok for us to be vulnerable. Instead of popping a pill to forget the pain or putting a plug inside our bodies to pretend that nothing is going on, I’m suggesting we do just the opposite. I’m suggesting that we allow our bodies to expand and that we come together in support of one another. I’m suggesting that true strength is in vulnerability.”

DeAnna L’am, another West Coast leader, is a leader in what she calls “Menstrual Empowerment.” Her intention is to help women and girls make coming-of-age easier, and womanhood richer. DeAnna has been teaching nationally and internationally, empowering women to reclaim menstruation as a source of inner guidance and spiritual renewal, coaching moms in welcoming their coming-of-age daughters into womanhood with ease and comfort, and training women to hold Red Tents in their communities.



DeAnna has been known to share the following visualization:

Imagine that your mother, born in the Red Tent and given time there during her maidenhood, becomes pregnant and is nurtured in the red tent by her sisters, friends, aunts, mother. Imagine that she gives birth to you among her sisters with the support of the midwives and then returns each month, breastfeeding you there until you are old enough to be left at home. Imagine further that when you are coming to your moon-time, you too are welcomed there. A ceremony is held to honor your blood-rites, your initiation into womanhood. As you grow and learn about women's mysteries and sexuality, you then come into your own adulthood and the cycle starts again.



Interior of a Red Tent at SE Women's Herbal Conference.

IMAGINE THAT WORLD

In many ancient cultures there were traditions of women taking some sort of regular moon lodge and sacred women's space away from daily life and the business (and busyness) of village and family. Somehow through the ages and cultures, this act of sanity and regeneration was interpreted to mean that women are unclean. In modern culture, we often get the sense that we must be at the "top of our game" even during our menstrual cycles. Thus there is a clear message that our monthly blood is a curse to endure or an inconvenience to ignore.

"Many things related to women have acquired negative connotations as we've moved into the grip of patriarchy," says Corinna Wood. "During the menstrual cycle, the body goes through hormonal changes that allow women, if they are in tune, to access deeper intuition, power, insight, and wisdom. These mysteries have been ignored, repressed, feared, and criticized by society and thus these states have been inaccessible to most women."

Corinna is the director of Red Moon Herbs, a small business making herbal medicines from fresh, local plants since 1994. Long passionate about women's ritual and connection, Corinna directs the Southeast Women's Herbal Conference, an annual event held outside Asheville, NC. One special feature at the weekend conference is an always-open Red Tent, beautifully decorated and staffed with volunteers who welcome women and facilitate connection.

Corinna defines the movement as a process of reclamation. "It provides us the voice to acknowledge that we aren't men and that we needn't pretend that our bleeding days don't affect how we function. It gives us permission to take quiet time to explore the depths that our women's bodies are able to offer us." She goes on to say that "this is a place to listen to the wisdom of our bodies, feel into the pain of menstrual cramps, speak aloud in talking circles, or express the emotions built up over the last month."

"Before electric light, women of bleeding age who were not pregnant

would bleed around the time of the new moon and retreat together," says Corinna Wood. During this time, we assume with some comic relief, the men and older children would need to fend for themselves as the women would sneak off with nary a glance back — to renew themselves. Corinna informs, "Now that electric light and a fast-paced life have affected our pineal glands and hormonal systems, women bleed at all different times of the month."

So we adjust the honoring rituals to our modern realities. Some Red Tents are dedicated spaces — a community yurt or a tent in someone's yard — open all the time for women to take retreat for five minutes or five days. Women go there to be alone or with a few others to take much-needed reflective time. While this is a wonderful resource to have when actually bleeding, more practically, Red Tent meetings happen as once-per-month gatherings on the New or Full Moons with women who live near each other. The meeting space is often womb-like, decorated richly with deep red colors, with rounded contours and low lighting. Women who participate either rotate leadership or take on assigned roles, which include scheduling, reminding, decorating, clean-up, facilitation, or training.

Activities differ depending on the format. Together or alone, women may draw, sing, dance, write, or nap. One fairly consistent model is a "talking circle," which allows each woman to speak and be heard without interruption. The healing that comes from listening

and speaking is simple and profound. Elements of song and ceremony are sometimes incorporated. As Jasmin Starrchild reminds, “Traditionally this is when we do our drumming, our crafting, our visioning and dreaming, and our healing.”

As most women know, this is a time of the monthly cycle when suppressing emotions becomes nearly impossible. As Corinna Wood reminds her students, “these hormonal fluctuations are a powerful opportunity to release the emotions that we tend to hold down. This natural cycle of shedding layers — both blood layers and feeling layers — reminds us how to heal and release. When we keep unnamed and unfelt experiences inside of us, we risk tension and disease. Releasing blood and emotions is crucial to our well being as women.” As put by Jasmin Starrchild, “When we consciously release each month with intention, great healing can occur.”

The Red Tent Temple Movement is a place where women are invited to support other women in service to their communities. Yet this is a forum where we can learn from each other, teach each other and support each other.

As ALisa Starkweather says, “The Red Tent Temple offers women a state of beingness rather than our continual doing mode. What happens when we don’t have a plan or a direction? Are we keeping ourselves busy so we don’t feel? What are we hiding in our busyness that may speak to our hearts when we finally take time to slow down? And most importantly, as the world around us begins to shake, we are growing a foundation of connections locally with Wise Women who are gathering in our tents sharing support and wisdom on our womanhood journeys.

As women age and move out of their time of monthly blood, they are still welcome in the Red Tent. In many cultures, post-menopausal women become elders and take on the role of wisdom-keepers, nurturers, and teachers. Sometimes these elders create a White Tent to honor themselves in this the second stage of womanhood. Corinna Wood offers, “Women’s sacred space, whether Red Tent or White Tent, allows elder

women to enter this important phase from a place where the cup runneth over, rather than from a place of depletion. When we nurture ourselves, we are able to discover our sacred purpose and discover best how to serve and be served in our crone years.”

Corinna learned about monthly women-space during her 1993 apprenticeship with the well-known herbalist, Susun Weed. “We did monthly moon-lodge circles on the full moon, where we would sing songs, pass a talking stick, and be together. I’ve continued that in my community of women since then.” She now has a much larger vision than she did as a young woman 20 years ago. She muses, “Access to wisdom and truth is becoming more available as we facilitate our own healing

and therefore the healing of the planet. I see this whole movement as part of what’s happening on every level — the move towards the divine feminine and the reclamation and integration of women’s power.”

According to Jasmin Starrchild, “If you want to practice helping the earth rebirth herself, supporting healthy menstruation is the most important thing you can do for all of us.”

With DeAnna and ALisa teaching nationally and internationally, Jasmin on the West Coast, Corinna in the Southeast, and countless more women in Australia, Asia, and beyond, the revival is upon us. No longer the raucous and loud tent revivals we envision traveling through the countryside in times long past, but the grounded, consistent, and soulful revival of a tent made by and for women. These leaders are speaking a language new to our outer ears but deep and old to our inner knowing.

As we experiment with these practices and new ways of thinking, we revive. We are beckoned. Nothing less than this level of reclamation — of body, blood, and cycles — will reawaken the sacred in each of us. And then the flood of it will be unstoppable. ☺

RED TENT RESOURCES

- **ALisa Starkweather’s Red Tent Temple Movement:** P. O. Box 13, Baldwinville, MA, 01436. www.redtenttemplemovement.com.

- **DeAnna L’am’s Red Moon School of Empowerment.** <http://www.deannalam.com>.

- **Jasmin Starrchild’s Red Moon Medicine Movement,** <http://medicinemovement.ning.com/>

- **Corinna Wood, Red Moon Herbs** <http://www.sewisewomen.com/resources/red-tents.php>.

- **DVD about the Red Tent movement:** Isadora Leidenfrost, *Things We Don’t Talk About: Healing Stories from the Red Tent.* www.redtentmovie.com.



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