

Book Review

The New Return of the Great Mother: Birth, Initiation and The Sacred Feminine (2021), by Isa Gucciardi. Sacred Stream. 100 pages.
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Note: This text explores childbirth through cis-gender female experiences.

Isa Gucciardi's 2021 book, *The New Return of the Great Mother: Birth, Initiation, and The Sacred Feminine*, examines the energy of the Great Mother through the biological experiences of women. The Great Mother, the sacred feminine, Mother Mary, or Mother Earth, and any number of other names can represent how a human may perceive the Great Mother. Gucciardi highlights women's own stories before and during their childbirth experiences. She tailors the book to explore the creator aspect of the Great Mother and the nurturing and unwavering support and wisdom she can offer women during the initiation of childbirth. For people seeking the qualities the Great Mother carries, the author offers a way to receive healing and learning directly from this force, which can guide us toward embodying the Great Mother's qualities.

The author dedicates a chapter to the seven biological experiences the female body undergoes and the corresponding initiatory experience. The book focuses on the initiation of childbirth and the impact of inviting in connection with the Great Mother. Gucciardi explores how connection with the Great Mother has offered women the support they needed to make it through childbirth with greater well-being and empowerment, supporting them to become more of themselves and benefit the human life being born.

Gucciardi urges:

We must heal the places within us, individually and societally, that cause us to fear or have contempt for any part of ourselves, including the parts that are uniquely and divinely feminine. In doing so, we will begin to value the qualities of the Sacred Feminine—understanding, creativity,

receptivity, tenderness, ability to flow, etc.—and the Sacred Masculine—assertiveness, strength, giving, courage, focus, etc.—equally, allowing both aspects of ourselves to work in tandem to create a healthy, balanced state of being. (Gucciardi, 2021)

Gucciardi's work argues that female bodies are extensions of earth, linking the connection between earth, the Great Mother, female biology, and their corresponding initiations. She explores the initiations of birth, the first menses, the first sexual encounter, childbirth, menopause, and death.

She contends:

These events are driven by our biology and serve to usher us into new ways of knowing ourselves...in a perfect world, we would be given a proper framework to comprehend the power and vulnerability at the heart of initiatory processes. (Gucciardi, 2021)

This book offers a paradigm on initiation experiences that can and do impact pregnancy, birth, postpartum, and beyond.

The New Return of the Great Mother illustrates how women connect with this force through the altered state experiences of giving birth, in meditation, and through shamanic journeying. Gucciardi details how to connect to the energy of the Great Mother for the reader and illustrates how the connection can lead to a greater capacity to embrace the teachings offered by life experiences or to move through challenges with greater ease.

Isa Gucciardi, Ph.D., holds various degrees and certificates and is a dedicated Buddhist practitioner, studying with master teachers of various spiritual traditions over the past decades. She is the creator of depth hypnosis and maintains a private practice with institutions and individuals in Depth Hypnosis and Coming to Peace processes. Gucciardi's experience working with countless women humbled and intrigued her—how women moved through earlier initiations seemed to impact their future life experiences and initiatory experiences. She offers the support of the Great Mother's guided meditations to create healing of prior initiations that may have been interrupted, such as one's own birth experience. Gucciardi shares how anyone can connect with the force of the Great Mother to receive the support they need, specifically before, during, and after childbirth. Disruption to initiation is common and does not need to be viewed as a problem, though it can cause great suffering and even wounding to not feel supported when going through an intense and major life transition experience such as childbirth. If there is wounding, one can connect with the Great Mother as one possible way of receiving support

and healing in service of the initiatory experience where wounding occurred and in service of future initiations.

The New Return of the Great Mother contributes perspective on initiations and conscious childbirth. It offers detailed examples from women's voices to support conscious experiences of childbirth for both mother and child, with the possibility of creating a positive ripple effect far beyond the birth experience.

A guided meditation to meet the Great Mother is included at the end of her book, which can also be purchased separately.

Stephanie Cloutman, RN, BSN, CPN, CLC
Book Review Editor, JOPPPAH