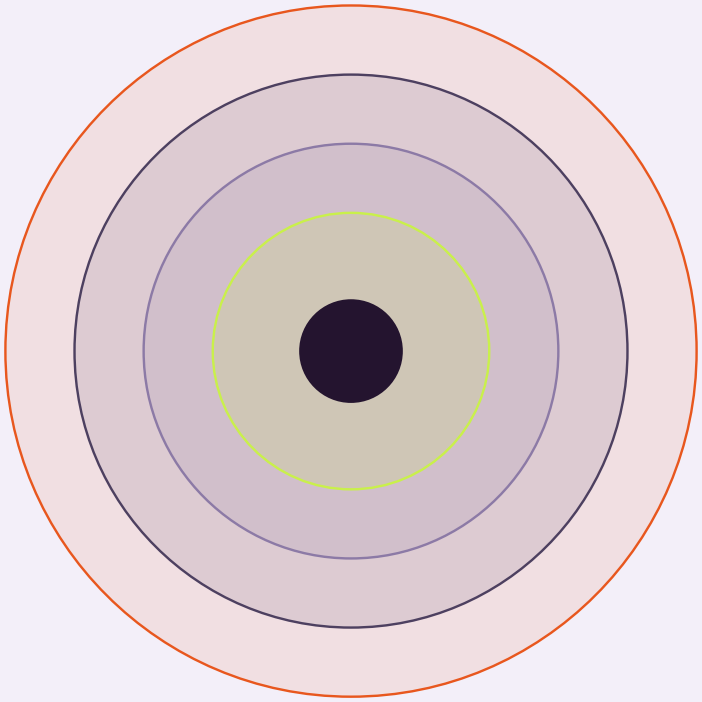
NOVEMBER 11, 2026



The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth

A reading of the book by Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor (1987)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Monica Sjöö, a Swedish-born painter and eco-feminist who lived in Britain, first set out these ideas in a 1975 pamphlet, which the writer Barbara Mor rewrote and expanded into this book. The authors argue that humanity's earliest religion centred on a Great Mother, bound up with women's bodies, the cycles of the moon, the seasons and the fertility of the earth. Across four parts they trace women's early culture, early religion and Neolithic societies, then the rise of patriarchal religion over roughly the last four thousand years. They draw on archaeology, myth, art and symbols such as the serpent and the lunar calendar, and argue that recovering an earth-centred view of the sacred could help repair our relationship with the planet. The book became a classic of goddess and feminist spirituality, but many archaeologists and historians dispute its picture of a universal prehistoric goddess religion and a matriarchal age.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The authors argue that the first image of the sacred was a mother giving birth, not a father giving orders.

Sjöö and Mor read prehistoric female figurines, cave art and burial customs as traces of a religion centred on a Great Mother from whom all life comes. In their account, people first understood the divine through birth, death and return. Many archaeologists read the same objects in other ways, so this is the book's case rather than settled history.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

In the book's telling, people first kept time by the moon.

The authors give long stretches of the early religion section to moon time and lunar calendars. They argue that the waxing and waning moon gave early people their first sense of a repeating cycle, and that it was tied in myth to women's bodies. Whatever you make of the history, the moon is still the easiest clock in the sky to read.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Treat the earth as a living body and you stop treating it as a supply cupboard.

The book's subtitle is its programme: rediscovering a religion of the earth. Sjöö and Mor argue that seeing land, water and seasons as sacred kept people careful with them, and that losing that view made it easier to use them up. It is an ethical claim as much as a historical one, and it is why the book still speaks to ecological writers.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Symbols tend to outlive the beliefs that first gave them meaning.

The authors follow images such as the spiral, the egg and the serpent across cultures. They read the serpent as an early sign of renewal, because it sheds its skin, and argue that later myths recast it as a figure of temptation and danger. You can test the method yourself by tracing one symbol through a museum or a book of myths.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The book treats the rise of patriarchy as a long shift over millennia, not a single event.

Its last part covers patriarchal culture and religion over roughly the past four thousand years. In the authors' account, sky gods and warrior societies gradually displaced earth-centred worship, and women lost religious and social standing along the way. Historians debate how, when and whether this happened in the form the book describes.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The authors read the European witch hunts as a war on women and on what was left of older folk belief.

The book takes up the witch hunts of early modern Europe in its account of the patriarchal era. Historians agree the persecution was real and killed many thousands of people, most of them women. Most of them reject the idea that the accused belonged to a surviving pagan religion, so read this part alongside a recent history of the trials.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

When the sacred is moved out of the body and the land, both are easier to exploit.

A thread through the later chapters is the split between spirit and matter. Sjöö and Mor argue that religions which placed the holy far above the physical world taught people to look down on bodies, women and nature together. They carry the same critique into modern industrial society.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A story can give people meaning even while its history is argued over.

The book's lasting influence is in the goddess movement and feminist spirituality, where it has been read as a source of imagery and belonging. Reading it well means holding two questions apart: what does this vision ask of me, and what does the evidence about the past actually show? Both are worth asking.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

For Sjöö, painting and argument came from the same conviction.

Sjöö was a painter before this was a book. Her 1968 painting God Giving Birth, inspired by the birth of her second son, drew a blasphemy complaint when it was shown in London in the 1970s. The 1991 second edition added colour plates, so the images sit beside the argument they were made for.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Read it alongside a critic
- [ ] Start a moon-time notebook
- [ ] Visit your nearest old place
- [ ] Mark this year's turning points
- [ ] Trace one symbol

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Look at the moon for a minute
- ◯ Walk the same route each week
- ◯ Ask who dug it up

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Read it alongside a critic

Pair the book with a sceptical account, such as Cynthia Eller's The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory (2000).

Pick one claim where they disagree and write down what evidence each side points to.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Start a moon-time notebook

Set up one note or a small notebook for a single lunar cycle, about 29 and a half days.

Write the date and the phase at the top of each page before you begin.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Visit your nearest old place

Find a prehistoric site, standing stone, burial mound or museum collection within a day's travel and plan a visit this month.

Read what the site's own archaeologists say about it before you go.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Mark this year's turning points

Put the next solstice and equinox in your calendar.

Next to each, note one thing that changes where you live, such as first frost, first blossom or the clocks changing.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Trace one symbol

Choose one image the book follows, such as the spiral, the serpent or the moon.

Look for it in one museum, building or book of myths, and write three lines on where it turns up and what it meant there.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Look at the moon for a minute

Each evening, step outside or to a window and find the moon.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Walk the same route each week

Take one short walk on the same route once a week.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Ask who dug it up

When you meet a striking claim about the ancient past, check who excavated the evidence, when, and what they concluded.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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30 ○						

December 2026

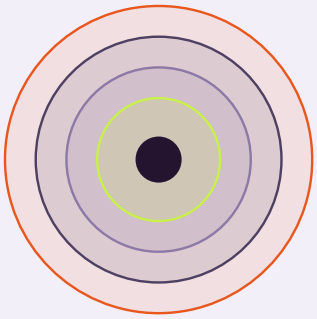
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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Whatever you make of its history, the book asks you to treat the earth as kin, not as stock.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER MONICA SJÖÖ AND BARBARA MOR