

## *Remember Who You Are*

### *Seven Stages on a Woman's Journey of Spirit*

By Linda Carroll

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"A lovely, timeless meditation on what it means to be a sentient, spiritual woman at home in one's own body and mind."

—Kaja Perina, Editor-in-Chief of *Psychology Today*

*A woman stands by a window on a sweet spring morning and she weeps for something she cannot name. She has everything she imagined she could ever want, yet on this day she is empty and filled with a yearning that has no face. Feeling in the world but not of it, she performs the tasks of everyday life in a solitude that enfolds her like a cocoon.*

The woman in the window is not alone. No matter what culture or spiritual tradition we are born into, human beings share her yearning. Our universal legacy of poetry, myth, and story suggests we are born connected to something beyond what we consciously recognize as reality—often called Spirit, God, Higher Power, Intuition or Essence.

Each of us is born with a connection to this divine essence. When we look at women's lives across cultures and life-stages, we can see that spiritual essence. Yet, in our everyday lives, we often lose connection. For each of us, rediscovering our shared and particular essence is our true life's work. *Remember Who You Are* is a book to help us do just that.

In the book, Linda Carroll shares her own discoveries and wisdom gleaned from other women's lives and art, especially poetry, to guide us on a seven-stage journey of recollection, reconnection, and recovery.

The stages, Forgetting, Remembering, Exploring, Practicing, Shadows on the Path, Reclaiming, all lead to Accepting, a condition woven throughout the stages. It is the knowledge that we never completely arrive. We are always on the path. We are always forgetting, exploring, practicing, struggling, becoming, and remembering who we are.

## The Seven Stages

**Forgetting**, or losing the connection to essential spiritual self, happens when we are born and enter the physical world. We develop a personality that allows us to adapt into family and society. This original self is rarely remembered, although at times we catch glimpses of it. Moments of unexpected grace—falling in love, acting from certainty rather than fear—are reminders. We reconnect with our essence, too, when our senses are moved by the natural world around us.

**Remembering** is the key to most world religions and to spiritual experience. It may be prompted by a thought, a poem, a luminous dream, a dramatic event such as a mystical experience, or any transition or change. In whatever way we are awakened, we are reminded for a moment of a different realm of existence with its own truth. Such revelations often signify the beginning of the journey back to essence.

**Exploring** spiritual ideas and religious practices moves us toward an awareness of essence. We explore traditional and unfamiliar forms of prayer, join women's circles within churches, temples, and community organizations, or attend retreats and seminars. Most bookstores now have an entire section devoted to "women's spirituality," reflecting an ever-widening acceptance of a new phase in women's history. Even the practice of pilgrimage (visiting sacred sites throughout the world) is undergoing a revival in our culture.

**Practicing** allows us to begin using rituals that can put us on the spiritual path each day. Some traditions use ceremonies, liturgies, prayers, meditation at a specific time and place; some embrace a lifestyle that itself becomes the practice. Without practice, the treasures we have found will almost surely lose their light and promise. With practice, the spiritual can entwine with the everyday, changing our sense of ourselves and the world in fundamental ways.

**Shadows on the Path** reflects on obstacles that will confront us, for this path meanders through as many low roads as high, and dips deeply into the world of emotions and innermost thoughts, even those we have previously thought unacceptable. We may feel grief for all the time we have lost in failing to attend to our deeper needs. Difficulties may emerge, too, in our relationships with others as we try to communicate what we are discovering. Our friends and loved ones may not understand—may even be threatened by—who we are becoming as we recognize our truer nature.

**Reclaiming** is that stage in which we begin to recognize and trust those things that have meaning for us, and we take hold of the direction of our lives, both inside and out. Being honest with ourselves and others is more consequential now. We are more accountable for our actions. Sometimes we are even able to challenge others and ourselves with more ease and less judgment, and feel more compassion for our common difficulties. At the end of most stories about a sacred journey, the voyager returns with hard-earned wisdom and many gifts for her community. We may find ourselves in the same jobs and relationships, but standing on new ground, seeing them through new lenses.

**Accepting** is less a stage than a condition woven throughout the stages. It is the knowledge that we never completely "arrive." We are always on the path. We are always forgetting, remembering, exploring, practicing, integrating and then forgetting again. Acknowledging this, we learn to accept the inevitability of lapsing into old responses with limited ways of seeing. We develop more patience and empathy, more humor about our human fragility, and greater tolerance for having to find our way back again and again.

*The Seven Stages in a Woman's Spiritual Path*, which became the seed for *Remember Who You Are*, began in an animated conversation on an airplane ride between Delhi and Bangkok with Linda's friends Karen Ruckman, a photographer, and therapist Ann Ladd. They imagined creating a book together about outward and inward journeys, taking inspiration from their travels to Asia and their shared curiosity about women's distinctive spiritual paths. When Linda began to write the book, she realized that the poems which had been her steady companions throughout her life beautifully illuminated the various stages of a woman's life journey.

For further information or to order the book visit Linda at [www.lindacarroll.org](http://www.lindacarroll.org)