SACRED DEFIANCE

Return to Self

The Return to Self

A 7-Day Journey Back to the Woman Within

BY JULIA LONGIN

This Journey Belongs To

Started on:

Returned to:

A moment I wish to remember as I begin:

Dedication

For the woman who forgot herself while loving everyone else.

For the woman who carried so much that she sometimes forgot she was allowed to be held too.

an who spent years becoming what the world needed... and is now ready to remember who she has

May these pages remind you that you were never something to fix.

You were someone waiting to be heard.

Welcome home.

The Return to Self

A 7-Day Journey Back to the Woman Within

By Julia Longin

There is a woman within you who existed before the expectations.

Before the roles.

Before the world told you who you needed to become.

She has not disappeared.

She has simply been waiting.

Welcome home.

WELCOME, BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

Before you begin this journey, I invite you to take a moment. Not to prepare. Not to become ready. Simply to arrive.

Perhaps it has been a long time since you created space that belonged only to you. A space where nothing is being asked of you. Where you don't have to be strong. Where you don't have to hold everything together. Where you don't have to become anything more than who you already are.

This journal was created as a quiet invitation. An invitation to pause. To listen. To remember.

Because somewhere between who we were and who the world asked us to become, many of us learned to leave pieces of ourselves behind. Not all at once. Often quietly. Slowly. A dream postponed. A truth unspoken. A need ignored. A part of ourselves hidden so we could belong, be accepted, or keep everything around us together.

We adapted because that is what humans do. We learn. We protect. We survive.

But the beautiful thing about the self is that it does not disappear. It waits. Beneath the expectations. Beneath the roles. Beneath the stories we collected along the way. Waiting for the moment we are ready to return.

Over the next seven days, you will gently explore the relationship you have with yourself. The woman before the world. The roles you carry. The stories you inherited. The wisdom of your body. The compassion you deserve. The joy you may have forgotten. And finally... the journey home.

There is no right way to do this. No perfect answer to find. No destination you must reach.

Allow yourself to be curious. Allow yourself to question. Allow yourself to feel. Take what resonates. Leave what doesn't. Your journey belongs only to you.

My hope is that somewhere within these pages you experience a moment of recognition. A quiet whisper of... "There I am."

Because perhaps the greatest journey we take is not the journey of becoming someone new. Perhaps it is the journey of returning to the person who has been waiting within us all along.

Welcome home.

With love, Julia

"The Return to Self begins with remembering."

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

There is no right way to walk this journey. There is only your way.

This journal is not something to complete, achieve, or perfect. It is a quiet space to meet yourself with honesty, curiosity, and compassion.

You may choose to move through these reflections over seven consecutive days. You may choose to spend a week, a month, or even longer with one question. Allow yourself to move at the pace your heart needs.

Before each reflection, I invite you to create a small moment for yourself. Make a cup of tea. Light a candle. Sit somewhere you feel comfortable. Take a few breaths. Allow yourself to arrive.

As you write, try not to edit your thoughts or search for the "right" answers. Let the words come. Sometimes the greatest insights arrive from the sentences we didn't expect ourselves to write.

Some questions may feel easy. Others may bring emotion, resistance, or uncertainty. Meet all of it gently. Every response is information. Every feeling is welcome. Every part of you has a place here.

You do not need to discover everything at once. Returning to yourself is not a race. It is a relationship. A conversation. A practice of listening.

So take your time. Be curious. Be kind. And remember... you are not here to become someone else. You are here to come home to yourself.

A GENTLE REMINDER BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Move slowly. There is no timeline for returning to yourself. No race to the finish. No prize for arriving first.

Some words may open doors immediately. Others may plant seeds that quietly grow long after you have turned the page.

Allow yourself the space to pause. To feel. To question. To simply be.

Growth does not always happen in the moments we are searching for answers. Sometimes it happens in the quiet spaces where we finally give ourselves permission to listen.

Trust your own rhythm. Honour your own journey. And remember... the parts of yourself you are searching for have been patiently waiting for you.

There is no need to hurry home.

DAY ONE

The Woman Before...

"Before the world told you who to become, there was already someone there."

THE REFLECTION

Before the expectations. Before the roles. Before you learned which parts of yourself received approval and which parts needed to be softened, hidden, or changed. There was you.

The child who laughed without questioning whether her joy was too loud. The girl who created, imagined, explored, and dreamed before she wondered if those dreams were realistic. The person who existed before the world started handing you definitions of who you should be.

For many of us, losing ourselves did not happen in one moment. It happened slowly.

A quiet compromise here. A piece of ourselves hidden there. A dream postponed. A truth swallowed. A desire dismissed.

Not because we failed. Because we adapted.

We learned how to belong. How to be loved. How to stay safe.

But the beautiful thing about the authentic self is that it does not disappear. It waits. Patiently. For the moment we are ready to remember.

Today is not about finding someone new. Today is about gently reconnecting with the parts of you that have always been there.

TAKE A MOMENT

Find a quiet space. Place your hand over your heart. Close your eyes.

Ask yourself: "Before I became who everyone needed me to be... who was I?"

Don't search for the perfect answer. Simply listen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What did I naturally love as a child?*
- *When did I feel most free?*
- *What parts of myself have I hidden or softened over time?*
- *What dreams or desires did I quietly put away?*
- *What qualities have always been part of me?*
- *What do I miss about the younger version of myself?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Today, do one small thing your younger self would have loved.

Play music.
Create something.
Walk barefoot outside.
Watch the clouds.
Laugh.
Dance.
Be curious.
Let her know you remember.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"The person I am searching for has been within me all along."

DAY 1 — NOTES

DAY TWO

The Roles I Carry...

"I am many things to many people, but beneath them all, I am still me."

THE REFLECTION

Throughout our lives, we collect identities.

Mother. Partner. Daughter. Friend. Carer. Professional. The strong one. The reliable one. The one who always manages.

Many of these roles are beautiful. They are created from love.

But sometimes without noticing, we become so committed to fulfilling them that we forget there is someone underneath them.

Someone with needs. Dreams. Feelings. Desires.

Someone who exists even when no one needs anything from her.

You are not here only for what you provide. Your worth was never meant to depend on how useful you are to others.

Today is an invitation to gently separate who you are from what you do.

TAKE A MOMENT

Before you begin, place both feet gently on the ground. Take a breath. Allow yourself to arrive here — not as the person everyone needs you to be, but simply as yourself.

Imagine placing all the roles you carry gently beside you for a moment. Mother. Partner. Friend. Daughter. Carer. The strong one. The capable one. The one who holds everything together.

Honour each of these parts of yourself. They have been created through love, experience, and the journey of your life.

Then softly ask: "If I put down everything I do for others, what part of me is asking to be seen?"

Listen gently. There is no need to answer immediately. Simply create space for the woman beneath the roles to speak.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *Who am I when nobody needs anything from me?*
- *Which roles bring me joy?*
- *Which roles have become heavy?*
- *Where do I feel responsible for things that were never mine to carry?*
- *What part of myself would like more space?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Spend thirty minutes today without achieving anything. Not working. Not serving. Not producing. Simply existing. Notice how that feels.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"I honor the roles I carry, but I remember the woman beneath them."

DAY 2 — NOTES

DAY THREE

The Stories I Was Given

“Not every story I carry belongs to me.”

THE REFLECTION

Before we ever begin consciously choosing who we are, the world begins telling us who we should become.

Some messages are spoken. Some are never said out loud. They are passed down through families, cultures, relationships, experiences, and the moments where we learn what brings acceptance and what creates rejection.

Be good. Be strong. Don't disappoint. Don't be difficult. Put others first. Work harder. Become more.

And slowly, these messages can become the invisible scripts we live by. Not because they are true. Because they became familiar.

Many of us spend years trying to become "enough" without ever questioning who taught us we weren't.

But awareness changes everything. When we gently bring these old stories into the light, we finally get to ask: "Is this mine?" "Is this still true?"

Does this belief help me become more connected to myself, or does it keep me separated from who I am?

Returning to yourself does not mean blaming the past. It means becoming conscious enough to choose what you carry forward.

TAKE A MOMENT

Place your hand over your heart.

Imagine yourself gently putting down a heavy bag you've been carrying for years.

Ask: "What have I been carrying that was never mine?"

Listen without judgement.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What beliefs about myself did I inherit?*
- *When did I first learn I needed to be more than I was?*
- *Whose approval have I been trying to earn?*
- *What old story am I ready to question?*
- *If I viewed myself with complete compassion, what new story would I tell?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Today, notice your inner dialogue.

Every time you think: "I should..." pause and ask: "Is this coming from love or expectation?"

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

“I honor my past, but I choose the stories I carry forward.”

DAY 3 — NOTES

DAY FOUR

The Wisdom of My Body

"My body was never working against me. It was always trying to communicate with me."

THE REFLECTION

Many of us spend years ignoring the quiet whispers of our bodies.

The tension. The exhaustion. The tightness. The heaviness. The moments where something inside us says: "Something needs attention."

But instead of listening, we push harder. We override. We keep going.

We ask our bodies to carry what our hearts have not yet had the space to process.

Our bodies hold our stories. Not as punishment. As communication. A reminder. An invitation. To return. To listen. To reconnect.

Healing begins when we stop seeing ourselves as something to control and begin creating a relationship with ourselves based on curiosity and compassion.

TAKE A MOMENT

Close your eyes.

Scan your body gently. No judgement. No need to change anything.

Simply ask: "What part of me is asking to be heard today?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *Where do I hold tension?*
- *What emotions have I pushed aside because there was no time?*
- *What does rest mean to me?*
- *When does my body feel most peaceful?*
- *What would change if I treated my body as a friend rather than something to manage?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Offer your body one act of kindness today.

Stretch.
Walk slowly.
Rest.
Breathe deeply.
Eat with presence.
Thank your body for everything it has carried you through.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"I listen with compassion to the wisdom within me."

DAY 4 — NOTES

DAY FIVE

eeting Myself with Compassi

"The parts of me I judged were often the parts asking for love."

THE REFLECTION

Many of us have spent years speaking to ourselves in ways we would never speak to someone we love.

We criticize the parts of ourselves that struggled. The choices we made before we knew differently. The ways we survived difficult seasons.

But what if we looked at ourselves through different eyes? What if every version of ourselves was doing the best they could with what they knew, felt, and understood at that moment?

Compassion does not mean we stop growing. It creates the safety where growth becomes possible.

TAKE A MOMENT

Before you continue, allow yourself to become still. Place one hand gently over your heart. Take a slow breath.

And for this moment, let go of the need to analyse yourself. To improve yourself. To judge yourself. To become anything other than who you are.

Imagine sitting beside every version of yourself you have ever been. The child who wanted to belong. The younger you who made choices with the understanding she had at the time. The person who carried things silently. The version of you who kept going even when it was difficult.

Instead of looking at those parts through the eyes of criticism, gently ask: "What if every version of me was worthy of compassion?"

Allow yourself to listen. Not for an answer you have to create. But for a truth you are ready to remember.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What part of myself have I found hardest to accept?*
- *What am I still blaming myself for?*
- *What did that version of me need?*
- *How can I offer understanding instead of criticism?*
- *What would I say if someone I loved shared this same story?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Find an old photo of yourself. Look at her. Not with judgement. With kindness.

Tell her: "I understand now."

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"I meet every version of myself with compassion."

DAY 5 — NOTES

DAY SIX

Remembering Joy

"The things that light us up are often the breadcrumbs leading us home."

THE REFLECTION

Somewhere along the journey of becoming responsible, many of us slowly stopped making space for joy.

Not because we stopped wanting it. But because life became full. Responsibilities grew. Other people's needs became louder. And the small things that once made us feel alive were quietly placed aside for another day.

One day became someday. Someday became years. Until we almost forgot the things that once made our hearts open.

But joy leaves clues. It lives in the moments where time disappears. The things we are drawn to without needing a reason. The songs that move us. The places that make us breathe deeper. The creativity that flows without needing to be perfect. The simple moments where something inside whispers: "There you are."

Joy is not something we have to earn after all the work is done. Joy is part of what reconnects us to ourselves. It reminds us that we are not here only to survive.

To serve. To achieve. To carry.

We are also here to experience. To create. To wonder. To feel alive.

TAKE A MOMENT

Close your eyes. Think back to a time when you felt completely yourself.

Not successful. Not impressive. Not needed. Just free.

Ask: "What was present in my life then that I have stopped making space for now?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What activities make me lose track of time?*
- *What did I love before I worried whether I was good at it?*
- *When do I feel most connected to myself?*
- *What beauty do I notice that others might miss?*
- *What have I been waiting for permission to begin?*
- *What small piece of joy could I invite back into my life?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Today, follow one small moment of curiosity.

Pick the flower.
Play the music.
Write the words.
Walk the path.
Create without showing anyone.
Do something simply because it feels like you.
No purpose. No outcome. Just connection.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"My joy matters. It is one of the ways I find my way home."

DAY 6 — NOTES

DAY SEVEN

Coming Home

"I was never lost. I was waiting to be remembered."

THE REFLECTION

The journey back to ourselves is not a destination we arrive at one day. It is a relationship we rebuild. A conversation we continue. A promise we return to. Again and again.

Life will still ask things of us. We will still love. Give. Care. Support. Hold space for others.

But something changes when we return to ourselves. We no longer disappear in the process. We learn that our needs matter too. Our dreams matter. Our voice matters. Our presence matters.

The goal was never to remove all the parts of ourselves that adapted. Those parts helped us navigate life. They protected us. They carried us. They got us here.

But now we can gently take their hand and say: "Thank you. I can lead from here."

Returning to yourself is not rejecting who you became. It is bringing every part of yourself home.

TAKE A MOMENT

Place one hand on your heart. One hand on your stomach. Breathe.

Imagine meeting the younger version of yourself. The one before the expectations. Before the doubts. Before she wondered if she was enough.

Ask her: "What do you want me to remember?"

Listen.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *What have I discovered about myself during these seven days?*
- *What parts of myself am I ready to welcome back?*
- *What do I want to stop apologizing for?*
- *What does living authentically mean to me?*
- *What promise do I want to make to myself moving forward?*

RETURNING PRACTICE

Today, choose one small promise to yourself.

Not a promise built from pressure. Not another expectation to carry. A promise created from kindness. A quiet commitment to honour the relationship you are rebuilding with yourself.

Maybe it is creating moments of stillness. Maybe it is speaking to yourself with more compassion. Maybe it is allowing yourself joy without needing to earn it. Maybe it is listening when your inner voice whispers.

Place your hand over your heart and ask: "What is one way I can continue returning to myself?"

Let the answer be simple. Let it be yours.

Because returning to yourself is not something you complete. It is something you practise. One choice. One breath. One moment of remembering at a time.

TODAY'S AFFIRMATION

"I am not becoming someone new. I am remembering, honouring, and returning to the truth of who I have always been."

DAY 7 — NOTES

THE WOMAN I AM REMEMBERING

Before you write your letter, take a moment to honour the journey you have just walked.

Look back gently. Not searching for how much you have changed. But noticing what you have remembered.

The smallest moments of awareness matter. The quiet shifts matter. The parts of yourself you have welcomed home matter.

REFLECTION

The part of myself I am beginning to remember is...

A belief I am ready to release is...

Something I want to offer myself more often is...

The promise I want to carry forward is...

A LETTER BACK TO MYSELF

Before you close this chapter of your journey, take a moment to pause.

Place your hand over your heart. Think about the woman you have met within these pages.

The younger versions of you. The parts you forgot. The parts you judged. The parts that quietly waited for you to return.

This is your moment to write back to yourself. Not from who you thought you needed to become. But from the wisdom of who you are today.

You may wish to begin with... "Dear me..."

Tell her what you now understand. Tell her what you wish she had known. Tell her what you are ready to forgive, release, honour, or remember.

There is no right way to write this letter. No perfect words. Only truth. Only compassion. Only you, coming home to yourself.

A LETTER TO MYSELF

Dear me,

RETURNING TO THESE PAGES

This journal was never created to be finished and placed away.

It was created as a quiet place you could return to.

Because life will continue to change. You will grow. You will enter new seasons. You will meet new versions of yourself.

And sometimes, without realising, you may find yourself carrying too much again. Trying to be everything. Holding everything. Forgetting the quiet voice within.

When that happens, come back here. Not because you have failed. But because returning to yourself is a practice.

Read the words again. Answer the questions again. Notice what has changed. Notice what you now understand. Notice the wisdom that has grown within you.

Each time you return, you may discover something different. Because you are different.

The journey home does not happen once. It is a lifelong conversation with yourself.

And you are always welcome here.

WHEN I RETURN AGAIN

One day you may find yourself opening these pages again. Not as the same person who first began this journey. But as someone who has grown. Changed. Experienced more of life.

Each return offers a new conversation.

Today I am returning because…

Since I last opened these pages, I have learned…

Something I am ready to release now…

Something within me asking to be remembered…

The woman I am becoming feels…

ABOUT JULIA

The Return to Self was born from my own journey of remembering the woman beneath the roles I had carried.

After spending much of my life being many things to many people — mother, wife, carer, therapist — I began asking a question so many women quietly hold within themselves: "Where did I go?"

For over twenty years I have walked beside others through their own journeys of healing, growth, and self-discovery. My work has been shaped by psychology, Eastern traditions, holistic practices, nervous system awareness, and many other therapeutic approaches.

Yet the greatest lesson I have learned is this: we do not need someone else to tell us who we are.

Sometimes we simply need a safe space to remember. This journal was created as that space.

With love, Julia

CLOSING NOTE

As you close these pages, I hope you carry this with you:

Return often.

To your joy. To your truth. To your own quiet knowing.

The world will always have voices telling you who to become. May you always remember the one within you gently whispering.

"Come home."

With love,
Julia

“The Return to Self begins with remembering.”