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A Woman's Path: Women's Best Spiritual Travel Writing

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A sense of the spiritual arises in short spurts and over a lifetime of cherishing the soul and all things divine. Reassurance, peace and miracles are perpetual pursuits on Earth, thus from one vantage point humans encounter the mystical and stumble upon the eerie, and from another perspective they embrace an established religion and attempt to strengthen their spiritual conviction and maybe, if they're lucky, witness a miracle. In all this, they cope with the realities of Earth, realities such as the starkness of death.

In A Woman's Path, readers are presented with essays by women who pour their honesty and personal spiritual journeys onto the page with the fervor of someone who must. Mystical encounters, faith, miracles and the actualities of aging and death are themes of these collected essays that bear the names of writers familiar and not-so-familiar to the public.

A Woman's Path contains five sections—"Awakening the Soul," "Ways of Journeying," "Transforming the Self," "Walking on the Shadow Side" and "Emerging into the Light"—and can be likened to a road trip in which the reader is the sole passenger with no control over the itinerary. Stops are unannounced and eye-opening. They range from those that cause the passenger to squeal with trepidation as in "El Maestro's Magic Water" by Kelly Booth, which chronicles a stay at the residence of a curandero or glorified quack or in Booth's words "witch doctor" in Peru who leads guests on a ritual of swallowing a liquid through the nose, to stopovers leading to sacred places whispered in the prayers even of cynics, as in the miracle in Anne Lamott's "Knocking on Heaven's Door."

Essays that weigh the inevitable issues of every generation are part of A Woman's Path. "The Masseur" by Linda Watanabe McFerrin carries readers on a seamless excursion of accepting a dreaded decade in life, and "Home for the Dying" by Carol Stigger uses an economy of words to sweep readers into the emotions of a daughter who arrives at a death hostel in Kingston, Jamaica, to say goodbye to her mother, Lily. "The hand in mine moved slowly, as if we had time to invent a life together. I kissed her forehead and whispered, 'Goodbye, Mama, goodbye.'"

Some essays give one pause; others bring clarity to matters of the soul, yet as a whole the voyage is worth the price of the fare.

DOROTHY GOEPEL (May / June 2000)

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