



SURRENDER AND RELEASE PRACTICES: A GUIDE TO SURRENDER AND RELEASE FOR BLACK WOMEN

A BLACK PAPER

RESEARCH-BACKED LOVE LETTERS TO BLACK HEALING

What Are *Black Papers*?

Black Papers are love letters to our collective healing—research-informed, culturally grounded guides created by and for Black people. They center our stories, our history, and our liberation. Each paper honors the ways we have survived while offering pathways to rest, renewal, and thriving.

Black Papers are in-depth explorations on healing, faith, and liberation created specifically with Black people in mind. Unlike traditional white papers, which often center academic voices disconnected from our lived experience, Black Papers are written through the lens of cultural wisdom, clinical expertise, and a commitment to liberation.

This Black Paper, **Surrender and Release Practices**, invites Black women to explore rest as an act of resistance, to loosen the grip of hyper-independence, and to reclaim softness as a form of strength. It blends research, cultural insight, and practical guidance to help you reconnect with your body, your faith, and your ancestral wisdom.

Why Surrender and Release Matters for Black Women

“Surrender is not weakness—it is a radical act of reclaiming your humanity.”

For Black women, surrender can feel both necessary and dangerous. We are descendants of women who carried entire families, communities, and movements on their backs. We've been praised for being unshakable, invincible, and endlessly strong. But that praise has come at a cost—burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, and a nervous system that never feels safe enough to let go.

Surrendering is not about giving up power; it's about using it wisely—choosing when to rest, when to be held, and when to trust that you are worthy of ease.

How This Shows Up in Our Lives

The Weight of the “Strong Black Woman” Stereotype

- 76% of Black women report feeling pressure to be the “strong one” in their family or community (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).
- Constant over-functioning contributes to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and physical stress responses.
- Black women are 2x more likely to report “emotional burnout” compared to white women in similar caregiving and professional roles (APA, 2022).

Historical and Generational Trauma

- The hyper-independence many Black women carry is not personal failure—it is survival. Enslavement and systemic oppression conditioned our ancestors to remain vigilant and self-reliant.
- Research on intergenerational trauma shows that descendants of enslaved people often have heightened stress responses and hypervigilance (Yehuda et al., 2016).

Cultural and Religious Messages

- Black churches have been lifelines, but they've also amplified messages of self-sacrifice: “Be strong in the Lord,” “Carry your cross,” “Serve others first.”
- Faith-based surrender, when reimagined, can become liberating rather than burdensome.

The Psychological and Physical Toll

- Black women are 60% more likely than white women to experience high blood pressure (CDC, 2023).
- Sleep disturbances, muscle tension, and chronic fatigue are common physiological responses to stress.
- Chronic stress shortens telomeres, which accelerates cellular aging—a process disproportionately impacting Black women due to the stress of racism and gendered expectations (Geronimus et al., 2010).

Why Practicing Surrender Is Essential

“Your body is speaking—even when you ignore it. Rest is not a luxury; it is survival.”

Reclaiming the Right to Rest

Rest is not laziness—it’s liberation. Studies show that intentional rest lowers cortisol, improves immune function, and strengthens emotional regulation (Hartig et al., 2014). When Black women rest, we are resisting systems that profit from our exhaustion.

Breaking the Cycle of Hyper-Independence

Releasing the need to “always be strong” opens space for authentic connection—with self, with others, and with God.

Healing from Trauma and Restoring Balance

Surrender practices regulate the nervous system, reducing hypervigilance and helping the body return to a state of safety. Trauma recovery research highlights the role of somatic and spiritual practices in rebuilding trust in the body (van der Kolk, 2014).



Practices for Surrender and Release

These practices invite you to move gently, at your own pace. Take what resonates, leave what doesn't, and return to what feels nourishing.

Somatic Practices

- Grounding Touch: Place one hand on your heart and the other on your abdomen. Repeat, "I am safe. I am supported. I am allowed to rest."
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Slowly tense and release muscle groups from feet to head to discharge held tension.
- 4-7-8 Breathwork: Inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8.

Spiritual Practices

- Prayer of Surrender: Offer worries to God using 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."
- Psalm 23 Visualization: Picture yourself by still waters, resting in God's presence.
- Gratitude + Release Journal: Write 3 gratitudes and 1 burden you're giving to God, your ancestors, or the universe.

Inner Narrative Work

- Reframe Strength: Affirm, "I honor my strength by allowing myself to rest."
- Inner Protector Dialogue: Reassure the part of you that feels you must stay on guard.

Ancestral and Cultural Reflection

- Reflect on ancestors who embodied both strength and rest. Imagine them smiling as you choose rest—they did not survive so you would live in constant struggle.

Rest Practices for Body, Mind, and Spirit

- Sacred Rest Space: Create a cozy corner with blankets, candles, and photos of loved ones.
- Intentional Sabbath: Choose one day to release as many responsibilities as possible.

Guided Visualization

Picture placing all your burdens in a basket and handing them to God or placing them in a safe, sacred space.

SOFTNESS IS NOT THE OPPOSITE OF STRENGTH. IT IS STRENGTH REIMAGINED.

Reflection & Call to Action

Embracing the Power of Surrender

Surrender is not letting go of power—it is choosing to use it differently. Each time you release, rest, or allow yourself to be held, you are saying: I deserve peace. I deserve to be cared for.

You are invited to try these practices, notice how your body and spirit respond, and share your experience. This, too, is a love letter to yourself.

References

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About the Author

Kimberly Reese, LCSW, is a somatic and trauma therapist, speaker, and writer committed to helping Black women heal, rest, and reclaim their wholeness. As the founder of The Reese Collective, she creates spaces for Black people to explore liberation through therapy, faith, and community care. Kimberly is also the creator of the Black Papers series, designed as research-backed love letters to Black healing.

For more on Kimberly's work:

