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Intro & Welcome |

dear beloved, can I call you that? I mean it as an offering of deep endearment.

(be)loved. It is also an invitation. A beckoning to return to what is true.

I am elated that you are here, that you were led here, that you are opening to healing here.

It is my honor to be your guide. My name is dr. shena young; my beloveds call me dr. shena. I am a body centered and holistic psychologist–healer, trauma-informed educator, consultant, yoga teacher, and survivor of many things. I created this healing space, *body rites*, for you, for yours, for all of us. I wish I could tell you when this all began, when I first started collecting and intuiting the healing wisdom and tools that will follow. I value knowing the inception of power, of knowing how a story began, but I am learning that time does not like to be contained or understood. It prefers to beat wildly, to pass freely. I am learning that healing and time are conjoined, that they hold onto their truths while moving together.

healing is in process (v.)

it is a process (n.)

it is something to own.

it is infinite—

above & beyond.

it is mine & yours & ours.

it is time.

I hope you remember these truths as you move in and out and through the healing on these pages. I hope that when you forget, these pages will help you remember how to be.

Welcome, beloved, to a journey of healing, in time.

IN MIND, BODY, HEART, & SPIRIT |

body rites is a holistic healing journey. I want to explain what that means, as a foundation for your experience, and also as a potential way of healing in life. Oftentimes, when we think about mental and emotional health, we center fitness of the mind. This is important, and also it inherently comes with limitations. Focusing on the mind as a singular means of healing is rooted in the beginnings of the field of psychology in the Western world, created by white men within systems that serve white people and oppress all others. The tools that were innovated in the psychology field's beginnings and beyond were used to establish superiority by way of biased and defective "science and proof" that others, namely folks of African ancestry were inferior. Consequently, this has influenced how we understand and relate to our mental health as individuals and in community as Black beings.

We have adopted westernized beliefs/value systems that have shaped our lives and our healing is no exception. I use the word "adopted" loosely. What feels more true is that Black beings have been conditioned under the institution of colonization. Our minds, bodies, and our healing have been manipulated through enslavement and its contemporary descendants and manifestations. This is an intrusive, abrasive, and abusive process that continues to impact how we move in the world, how we understand it, how we relate to ourselves/others, how we shrink/stand in our power, how we are disjointed from our personal truth, and how we externalize our trust in determining what is best for us on our healing journeys. And for multi-generations we have practiced forgetting as a means of survival.

*when you turn the last page,
I pray your arms are joyously tired from
holding all that you remembered and discovered.*

While many of us can recognize the overt ways in which historical oppression colors our present experiences, some of us may have a harder time sensing into the insidious nature of colonization and the harm it causes. The enslavement of African people and colonization forbade our people's use of their indigenous medicines, access to sacred plants and herbs, music, language, movement, foods, and spiritual tools. We were people deeply connected to the elements—earth, water, air, and fire. We held our elders close and our ancestors in sacred embrace. We experienced elevation and healing as a collective, in community.

body rites, as a holistic healing journey, anchors into the practice of decolonizing our medicine and reclaiming our body sovereignty. It reaches back into our indigenous roots and land-based healing. It centers remembering as a means of survival. We are not just minds or brains. We are not simple, compartmentalized beings. We are complex, whole, dynamic beings and all of our aspects/parts are interconnected. Thus, attending to our healing is not merely a mental exercise. When we are grounded in these truths—remembering and decolonizing our

medicine—our healing can take on a different path. In this context, the practice of decolonizing is to untangle and unbraid ourselves and ways of being from oppressive conditioning. It is to reach back into the wells of wisdom and traditions that we once knew, those that were lost in surviving global colonization so that healing is shaped from the inside, rather than controlled from the outside. Ultimately, it is hoped that this unbraidng process will incite memory of body sovereignty—the knowing that your body is yours.

Some notes on decolonizing healing |

Unlearning is a long haul, but I have one tip to root the decolonization of your healing practices.

QUESTION EVERYTHING. Many of us are already doing this work; some of us may be afraid to ask questions because we fear the answers will challenge everything we have come to believe or have been taught. It might. There is no shame in that.

*The practice of fear is oppression working.
Fear is oppression spreading out inside.
It is the embodiment of colonization.*

So, here's a list of questions to keep close and space to add your own, in the spirit of remembrance and accountability. I invite you to ask yourself:

- Are the values I practice also tools that have been used to oppress me and my communities?
- Where did it come from—that belief, value, energy, judgment? Where did I learn this?
- Where did the fear come from? Is it mine or was it left with me? If it was left with me, was it to protect me or to protect them/others/oppressors?
- Why am I afraid of remembering what has been forgotten?
- Do my values and practices dilute my authenticity and truth?

OK, so how do we put this all into practice in healing from sexual trauma? I see you asking questions. I invite you to consider shifting your healing orientation into a paradigm that inspires your remembrance—one that assists you in the whole beautifully complex being that you are. Even as you are reading this, I invite you to notice how it feels to be affirmed in your wholeness in this exact moment. *body rites* is grounded in a **mind–body–heart–spirit** orientation that I discovered in my own healing journey and in holding sacred therapeutic space for others. I have witnessed its power and reach and am honored to share it with you. At the base of this paradigm of healing, is an understanding of T R A U M A. Trauma affects the whole being (more on this in the next chapter), and thus, healing can be profound when it holds the whole being as well—mind, body, heart, spirit. The mind aspect is concerned with our beliefs, truths/untruths, how we think about ourselves and the world. The body, perhaps one of the most neglected aspects in the mental health field, is about how our lived experiences manifest physically, physiologically, and energetically. The heart part regards our relationships and love for self and others. Lastly, the spirit facet is about our relationships with a god or a higher power/self, sense of purpose, intuition, and our ancestors.

IN FLOW—A WORD ON HOW |

body rites is the first of its kind—an embodied healing journey and holistic resource/workbook of rituals for Black women, femmes, and nonbinary survivors of sexual assault. This workbook is a gentle guide and liaison, exploring the impact of sexual trauma on the mind, body, heart, and spirit. It is an invitation to heal holistically, drawing upon indigenous medicine, psychophysiology, lived body wisdom, trauma-informed embodiment practices, and kinship/ancestral connections.

Most urgently, it is a series of intimate conversations with your self and remembrance that healing lives at the core of your intuition. Additionally, because it is time that we reclaim our voices in shaping healing spaces, I have also written a brief epilogue for helping professionals that journey with and hold space for our communities.

All this in mind, there is no wrong way to do this. I suppose that if there is a right way, it would be something only you could determine. I know that beginning a new healing venture can be overwhelming though, so I would like to offer some suggestions for using the workbook. Please know that you are supported in discerning your method and your path through.

Disclaimers & Invitations

I believe that we have much of what we need inside to heal. I believe that because many of us have forgotten, in order to survive, that we might have to reach back or more deeply to retrieve the wisdom that exists within us and just beyond us. To this end, I anticipate that in these pages you will remember things you have forgotten, things that you did not realize you

knew, and things that you need for this exact time. And if your heart is open to it, I think you might discover some new things too.

This workbook has been written with the utmost thoughtfulness and intentionality. It has been designed to be experienced in the order it is presented, but I know healing ain't linear! The earlier sections are written to support your settling in, gathering tools for what's to come, and to ground in context. The middle sections guide you through the work and embodied healing practices, collecting and deepening rituals along the way. At last, we close in the clutch of our ancestors and liberatory self-reflection. However, if you find yourself drawn to explore sections spontaneously, please do with all your fervor. Know that you do not need permission or instructions for your journey. The journey is yours.

You will also notice that the workbook is beautifully decorated from beginning to end. I believe that aesthetics hold our gaze steady so that we can see more. They help us to be present, and they remind us of the beauty within and around us. I encourage you to invite the aesthetics into your experience; to notice what they invoke; and to observe when they reflect, hold, or stir you. Each piece of art on these pages has been meditatively created in collaboration with one of my favorite beings on the planet, dr. shyma el sayed. In many moments throughout, you will be invited to witness, create, engage with, and write on the art. Be free in your expressions and in this space that is all yours—I hope you will write, draw, paint, imagine, collage, or tea or coffee stain all over it.

Behold, beloved, be moved by your healing art.

OVERVIEW OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE HISTORY, WHY, & PRINCIPLES |

There are many roots anchoring this journey. Years of study, living, healing, experimenting, channeling, being, unlearning, and unfolding. There are the medicinal contributions of elders and my revered teachers. There is the rich soil of empty space on these pages that awaits planting of your healing intentions. There is the fundamental truth that you deserve healing space that understands the power of personal choice, that celebrates you being in control of you and your body, and that is trauma informed.

Trauma informed, trauma sensitive, trauma conscious, and other varied expressions speak to this fundamental value system. While trauma-informed care has become quite the trend and buzz of the well-being world, many are relating to it as a principle when it is a culture (shift). I am sharing this with you for two reasons. One, because I also value transparency and want you to know what I know to bolster healthy vigilance on your healing journey, here and beyond. Two, I want you to know that you deserve this kind of care in every area of your life. So, let's get into it!

I love discovering synergy and collective consciousness. This is what it felt like when I stumbled on the trauma-sensitive ideology in 2011. I was in graduate school at the time, constantly navigating competing energies between my intuition and the “science” of the field of psychology. As a novice clinician, I was being taught to ground my orientation/approach to therapy in evidence-based practices, or practices that were deemed legitimate and effective through rigorous research and clinical trials. Many of these research studies excluded or underrepresented the communities I work with and come from. It often felt like an act of betrayal to anchor my clinical orientation in theories written by white folks who were studying the lived experiences of white folks. Additionally, I felt immense discomfort with the inherent power dynamic connected to these theories, particularly in ways that seemed to disempower the clients/communities I was working with. Enduring individual and systemic violations that abate personal/collective power and choice is difficult enough, but to then ask folks to entrust their care to spaces that maintain those same values was painfully counterintuitive for me.

I had begun experimenting with centering intuition, self-determination, spontaneous insight, and the body narrative as medicinal and a covert theoretical orientation, when I discovered trauma-sensitive pedagogy. To be clear, trauma sensitive, interchangeably known as trauma informed or trauma conscious, is not a psychological theory. It is a way of being and holding and, in my opinion, a non-negotiable practice. While I will not be offering a comprehensive overview of trauma-informed care here, I want to highlight some of the most essential themes.

Trauma-informed care, as a framework, is rooted in anti-oppression and anti-racism efforts. It intimately knows that the healing journey is complex, nuanced, person-specific, and that it is one of bottomless choices. It is an accountability practice for professionals that hold space for healing and, more expansively, a culture that we all have a role in shaping and are worthy of. Trauma-informed care prioritizes the lived experiences of survivors, their intersectional identities, multiplicitous contexts, and with regard to our beloved Black humanity, the impact of targeted harm across generations. In this same vein, to be trauma informed is to know vulnerability in healing and to avoid causing further harm and/or retraumatization as much as possible. Most imminently, trauma-informed care celebrates and nourishes the truth that every being everywhere is their own guru or awo.

I have condensed and presented the primary trauma-informed care tenets below. I invite you to notice what feels resonant and keep them close as you journey forward here and also in the world. May they become the bare minimum standard for you and all of us in healing. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2011) identifies the following core principles of trauma-informed care as safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural competence. I have modified collaboration as cocreation and added consciousness and self-determination as additional principles in my practice, in efforts to fill in gaps. Each of the workbook sections to follow stand on these trauma-informed care principles as part of the

foundation for healing. Below, I have created a quick reference and affirmation guide of trauma-informed care principles to return to as needed. You're invited to add and/or edit the affirmations as it feels right.

It is my deep belief that self-determination in the healing process (and in general!) is transformative, urgent, and a powerful path to sustainable freedom. While this is not explicitly named as a principle in the trauma-informed care tutelage, I am naming it here as vital and worshipped in this healing space. I hope that you feel that throughout.

safety | to feel safe in your being, in relationship, in healing space, and in the world is your birthright. It is a process and takes time. People and places can intend to inspire feelings of safety, but only you can determine your experience of safety.

{ Affirmations? Feeling safe takes time.

trust | is earned and grows in relationship. It lives in the heart space and can change based on experience.

{ Affirmations? I know when trust is here because I feel it in my heart.

choice | making choices on the healing journey is an act of power and reclamation. In the practice of making choices, survivors are able to reconnect with their intuition and become an active informant to their care. Receiving invitations to choose between options, to choose timing, and to opt in/out are all examples of what this can look like.

{ Affirmations? Making choices in healing is an act of power and something to be reclaimed.

cocreation | is a dance. It requires mutual respect and sees a survivor as a decision maker and part of a team.

{ Affirmations? My voice is important in shaping the care I receive.

empowerment | happens when others inherently believe that a survivor's voice, sense of power, and knowing matter. Empowerment looks like believing what a survivor is saying about their experience and needs, centering their personal strengths in their care, and bolstering their confidence along the way.

{ Affirmations? I am worthy of having a support team that believes me and celebrates my strengths.

cultural competence | is one aspect of offering competent care. At minimum, all professionals on a survivor's team should be competent in their skillset and operate within their respective scopes of practice. This includes knowing their limitations, biases, and blind spots when working with marginalized identities and the potential impact of causing harm. Helpers should center the lived experience of survivors and their identity intersections when making recommendations.

{Affirmations} My story is rich and complex in its layers, and I deserve care that can competently and responsibly hold space for me.

self-determination | allows a survivor to decide who and how they want to BE. In the healing space, it supports intuitive and informed decision making that feels aligned with what is needed in the moment even when it departs from what others think is best for them.

{Affirmations} self-determination is a path to freedom.

Freedom + choice + intuition

*"These are things that were lost. These are the things you will take back.
They belong to you."*

The journey is yours

I invite you to take a moment to remember how you discovered this book, to allow yourself to travel back in time. How did it happen? Was it a gift from a loved one? A social media post? Were you browsing the shelves of your favorite book store? What feelings came up? What made you light up? What made it feel right, and like the right time? I invite you to take a few breaths into these acknowledgements. Openings for healing can be so serendipitous, curious, so mysterious even. Do you trust your drawing to this journey? I do. The moment this book landed in your hands, is when the ceremony began. As we move forward, I want to encourage some reliable practices that you can return to throughout. I invite you to think about this as an opening ritual.

"Triggers are visits from the past."

—Bea Hyacinthe of Love & Kindness Wellness

TRIGGER + CONTENT/CARE WARNING |

I encourage you to continue checking in with yourself about your capacity as you progress through the workbook. This work is personal and for many can excavate painful memories—our own and those we are connected to. When you notice that your body is asking for a break or distance from the material, I invite you to pause, use the tools you’ll be accumulating throughout, or opt out perhaps returning to triggering sections later, if that feels right. Oftentimes, when folks are triggered, they are encouraged to ground, find stillness, and recenter in the present moment. These can be great options. However, I encourage you to experiment with *moving through* the trigger—exploring movement as an alternative to stillness—this might look like rocking, swaying, stomping, stretching, or a gentle flow of shapes. This helps the body to move through the traumatic memory, as opposed to tucking it away or creating the climate for it to get lodged somewhere inside. When we move through it, we free up space in our bodies. You get to decide what feels right in those moments. Know that you can take your time and choose the pace.

Sweet code of healing

To begin, I would like to offer some suggestions for agreements you might make with yourself and invite you to write in your own. These agreements, or sweet code of healing as I affectionately call them, are gentle intentions and ways to hold yourself in compassion and accountability. As you edit these and add your own, you might consider what you need from yourself to promote ease, what you need when things get hard, what helps you to follow through, and what gets in the way.

- Set some healing intentions; what would you like to happen in this journey?
- Be honest with yourself.
- Listen to and honor your body/intuition. Everything is an option.
- Know that your choices are supported.
- Modify, tweak, and adjust as you need, as much as you need.
- Hold yourself gently and with love.
- Get your support squad together (up next!)
- Ask for support when you need it.
- Use your self-care plan generously (more on this in a bit!)
- Determine your own pace. This will help you to see the journey through.
- Do your best.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Support squad

Do not distribute

Dear beloved, having quality and dependable support is essential! I encourage you to consider what this means for you. Who are the people, where are the places, and what are the things that encourage feelings of safety, being held, and nonjudgment perhaps. This list might include therapists, friends, family, pets, partners, elders, or spiritual advisors. If it feels OK, I invite you to selectively tell them you are embarking on this journey and how you'd like them to support you. You may even feel inspired to invite close friend-survivors to grab their own copy and journey through the workbook with you.

Who are your people?

How do you like/need to be supported?

What are the barriers to asking for what you need?

How would you like to share your support needs with your people?

Self-care plan

Do not distribute

We have begun the conversation (and the work!) of decolonizing our healing. I might argue that self-care is at the center of that. When we can see ourselves at the center of our concentric circles, with passionate conviction, our healing flourishes. This is indeed a paradigm shift for Black women. We have been conditioned and nonconsensually obligated to the CARETAKING of others, at the expense of ourselves. We have internalized an ethos and value system that disturbingly affirms selflessness as aspirational, self-care as selfish, and self-abandonment as a determination of worth. To be clear beloved, I am not coming for you. *I am you.* This mayhem did not miss me. I want to instigate your critical side eye and inspire a new way of being in time. As we know, healing doesn't happen overnight, but an inner rebellion can commence at any time.

I invite you to rebel, beloved, perhaps by crafting a self-care plan that you can relentlessly return to throughout this ceremony. First, by considering your relationship with self-care as it is at present, by reimagining it with you at the center, and lastly identifying barriers to following through. I'll walk with you through it. Bear in mind that this is JUST the beginning, a foundation. Your self-care game will undoubtedly change and evolve in these ceremonial pages.

You're invited to offer yourself time to reflect on the journaling prompts on the following page.

