

Resmaa Menakem, in his groundbreaking book, My Grandmother's Hands, reveals how the history of racism and trauma is held and replayed in our body's survival responses. He offers us body-centered practices for healing as part of a roadmap for personal and collective steps towards eradicating racism, resolving trauma, and healing our nation. The following practices are excerpted from My Grandmother's Hands.

Please begin by setting aside time, and letting go of any goals, agendas or expectations. If possible, turn off your cell phone and electronics, and give yourself permission to simply be right here, right now.

These practices are designed to help you consciously and deliberately inhabit, settle, soothe and feel safe in your body, relax your muscles, and open pathways for healing.

### **Practice 1: Body Scan**

Sit comfortably in a chair. Take a few breaths in and out, feeling the air move in and out of your body. If possible, feel the breath flow all the way into the belly, and relax out with the out breath. Close your eyes, or let your gaze be downward.

Notice the experience of the chair against your back. Notice the sensations of your feet on the ground.

Starting with the top of your head, slowly scan your body from top to bottom. Pay attention to each part as you slowly move your attention downward. Notice where there is pain or discomfort, where there is constriction, where there is relaxation or expansiveness, where there is numbness.

First, let awareness move slowly down your forehead, through your face, then down your neck. Follow attention as it moves across the top of your shoulder blades, the down your torso, and into and down your arms.

Continue to let awareness descend down into your torso and arms, through your hips and buttocks, and into your hands. Experience your attention spreading into your fingers and then out your fingertips.

Continue to let awareness move down your legs, through your knees, and down to your ankles. Pay attention to your major joints - your ankles,

knees, hips, wrists, elbows, and shoulders. These are spots where energy often gets blocked. If you feel an urge to move any of these, feel free to do so.

Follow your attention into your feet, then down into your toes, then into the bottoms of your feet.

Take a moment to notice where your soles meet the ground. Pause to feel the sensations of the soles of the feet as they rest on the ground, feeling supported by the ground.

Again, take a few deep slow breaths in and out, feeling the air move in and out of your body. Slowly open your eyes, or lift your gaze, and softly bring awareness to your surroundings in front of you, in back of you, and all around you.

## **Practice 2: Breathe, Ground and Resource**

Take a few deep breaths. Let your body relax as much as it wants to.

Think of a person, an animal, or a place that makes you feel safe and secure. Now, imagine that this person or animal is beside you right now, or that you are in that safe place.

Breathing naturally, let yourself feel that safety and security for about a minute.

Feel into your body. Where does it seem constricted, uncomfortable, or unwell in any way? Note each of these locations.

Pick one of these locations and focus on it. For a few seconds, let yourself fully experience the constriction or discomfort.

Then, once again, visualize the person, animal, or place that helps you feel safe and secure. Imagine you are in that place or that the animal or person is beside you. Experience this safety for a moment or two.

Do this for each part of your body that feels uncomfortable or constricted.

### **Practice 3: Sounding**

Vibration has a uniquely powerful settling effect on the human body. The vibrations of the sound *voooooo* or the sound *om* (pronounced in three syllables - *ohhhhhh-ahhhhhh-ummmmm*) can be particularly settling and calming for the nervous system.

Get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Let your shoulders relax.

Breathe in slowly and deeply. As you exhale, for the full duration of the exhale, very slowly make the sound *vooooo* or the sound *ohhhhh-ahhhh-ummm*.

Pay attention to how your body vibrates with the sound. Then breathe in, and begin again.

Do this for ten long, slow exhalations.

When you are done, pay attention to whatever sensations you experience in your body.

Alternatives or Additional Sounding Practices:

Sing a slow soothing song to yourself - perhaps a lullaby, or a gospel tune or hymn - as you work, walk, drive, or exercise. Or, with each exhalation, hum a low, even tone. Afterward, notice what your body experiences.

### **Practice 4: Slow Rocking**

Get comfortable, and take a few slow, deep breaths into the belly, letting go with the out breath. Then, slowly rock your upper body from side to side, or forward and back.

If you like, play or hum a slow soothing tune and rock to its beat.

When you are done, pause, and notice what your body is experiencing.

## **The Practice of the Five Anchors**

The practice of the five anchors can support you to be present, safe and grounded in your body in the midst of, or in the wake of, stressful or conflicted experiences. These anchors can help you experience your capacity to respond to your world and your circumstances with wisdom versus reacting from anger or fear.

### **Anchor 1: Soothe yourself to quiet your mind, calm your heart, and settle your body**

- \* Pause, breathe deeply in, and slowly out.
- \* Let go of the impulse to react or to speak out for a moment.
- \* If possible, sit down. Put your hands on your lap or on your knees.
- \* Engage in the **Breathe, Ground, Resource; Sounding;** and/or **Rocking** practices described above
- \* Do what helps you to slow down - petting a cat or dog, taking a walk, taking a long, slow drink from your mug

### **Anchor 2: Simply Notice the sensations, vibrations, and emotions in your body instead of reacting to or from them.**

- \* Bring awareness to the feeling of the soles of your feet on the ground, the sensations of your body sitting on the chair, your tongue against the roof of your mouth, the air against your skin, the feeling of your clothing meeting your body
- \* Experience and name each sensation - eg cold, tight, loose, trembling, relaxed,
- \* As thoughts, emotions, and possible reactions arise, don't run off with them. Bring your awareness back to your body and its sensations.

### **Anchor 3: Accept the Discomfort - and notice when it changes - instead of trying to flee from it.**

- \* Bring awareness to the sensation of discomfort in the body. Notice how and when it shifts or changes.
- \* When you get the impulse to analyze or think about the discomfort or situation, brings your awareness back to the sensations of the discomfort in the body. Again, notice when it changes.
- \* When the mind generates thoughts or strategies about what to do next, let go of following these thoughts. Return awareness

again to the feelings and sensations in the body. Let thoughts float by. Stay with your body in the present.

- \* Remind yourself that any discomfort you feel is a protective response, not a defective one. Accepting, experiencing, and moving through the discomfort is the foundation of healing.

**Anchor 4: Stay present and in your body as you move through the unfolding experience, with all of its ambiguity and uncertainty, and respond from the best parts of yourself.**

- \* When you find yourself focusing on the future or the past, use the first three anchors to bring yourself back to your body and the here and now.
- \* When your attention moves to what's wrong with you or with the other person, use the first three anchors to bring you back to the present.
- \* Don't try to know what will happen next. It's impossible.
- \* If someone asks you a question and your honest response is, I don't know, let yourself say, "I don't know."
- \* Don't try to get a particular response from anyone else.
- \* Act from the best parts of yourself - from your own deepest integrity. As events unfold, you'll sense what these parts are and what they have to say.
- \* If you find yourself reacting, know that every new moment is a new opportunity to catch yourself, come back to the here and now, and settle your body.

**Anchor 5: Safely discharge any energy that remains.**

After you have been in the heat of conflict or a stressful situation, its energy often remains bottled up in your body. For your physical and emotional well being, discharge it as soon as you reasonably can. Here are some good ways to do this:

- \* Most forms of exercise, including walking
- \* Playing most sports
- \* Dancing
- \* Singing
- \* Physical labor - yard work, house work, etc
- \* Follow your body's impulses to move, to shake, to run around the block....Let your body move how it wants to move, as long as these ways are not harmful