Excerpt from My Grandmother's Hands Pages by Resmaa Menakem

Clean pain is about choosing integrity go of what is familiar but harmful, finding the best p over fear. It is about letting parts of yourself, and making a leap with no guarantee of safety or praise. This healing does not happen in your head. It happens in your body. And it is more likely to happen in a body that can stay settled in the midst of conflict and uncertainty.

When you come out the other side of this process, you will experience more than just relief. Your body will feel more settled and present. There will be a little more freedom in it and more room to move. You will experience a sense of flow. You will also have grown up a notch. What will your situation look like when you come out the other side? You don't know. You can't know. That's how the process works. You have to stand in your integrity, accept the discomfort, and move forward into the unknown.

The alternative paths of avoidance, blame, and denial are paved with dirty pain. When people respond from their most wounded parts and choose dirty pain, they only create more of it, both for themselves and for other people.

When white supremacists discuss race in America, many of their arguments and positions are expressions of dirty pain and forms of fighting, fleeing, or freezing. Some common examples include talking but not listening; taking over all the energy in the room; denying other people's lived experience; jumping to statistics (which are often incorrect or misinterpreted); jumping to theory or philosophy or concepts or generalities (that is, fleeing from the body into the head); reframing racialized issues as issues about money or social class; focusing solely on personal responsibility and individualism; reductionism; objectification; false counter-narratives (such as "Black people simply don't work as hard as white people do"); avoidance; defensiveness; denial; blaming and accusations; and violence. This reflexive divisiveness negatively impacts bodies of every color.

White progressives have their own forms of dirty pain. They include white guilt; white savior complex ("Let me help you" and "I can fix this!"); ugly sympathy ("You poor, poor victims"); and taking over all the energy in the room by freaking out or bursting into tears. This last action is white progressives' signature form of white fragility. Many are unable to tolerate even slight discomfort around the complexities of white-body supremacy, trauma, and intersectionality with other forms of exploitation.

Many white progressives imagine they deserve a free pass because they are the "good ones." But white-body supremacy is itself a form of dirty pain. If you are a white progressive, you benefit as much from the structural inequities of white-body supremacy as a white conservative or a white supremacist.

We African Americans have our own forms of dirty pain. They include self-hate; internalized oppression; a bias favoring light skin over dark; a preference for shopping in white-owned businesses because we believe that "white people's ice is colder"; a habit of teaching our kids by "whupping" them; widespread use of the N-word; and a reflexive denigration of brothers and sisters who have achieved success. You'll recognize these as forms of traumatic retention.

Law enforcement professionals also have their own forms of dirty pain. Typically, they involve a reflexive distrust of authority; suspicion of anyone or anything that looks abnormal; extreme reactivity under stress; and a deep conflict between the desire to protect people and the urge to harm real and

potential troublemakers. It often involves silence and inaction in the face of wrongdoings by fellow officers.

Because public safety is a profession, not an ethnicity, many police officers routinely experience the dirty pain common to their profession and the dirty pain associated with their ethnic background. This makes one of the most difficult and demanding jobs even more difficult.

The particulars of moving through clean pain are unique to each person and each incident. However, the process can be described- and navigated.

The process involves five steps. Each one anchors you in the present and, most importantly, in your body. I refer to them as the *five anchors.*

- **Anchor 1:** Soothe yourself to quiet your mind, calm your heart, and settle your body.
- **Anchor 2:** Simply notice the sensations, vibrations, and emotions in your body instead of reacting to them.
- **Anchor 3:** Accept the discomfort and notice when it changes instead of trying to flee from it.
- **Anchor 4:** Stay present and in your body as you move through the unfolding experience, with all its ambiguity and uncertainty, and respond from the best parts of yourself.
- **Anchor 5**: Safely discharge any energy that remains.

You'll know you need to practice the five anchors when you sense a conflict building; when that conflict looks and feels as if it will continue to escalate; and when you feel a growing discomfort in your soul nerve.

Let's move through the process in detail.

ANCHOR 1: SOOTHE YOURSELF TO QUIET YOUR MIND, CALM YOUR HEART, AND SETTLE YOUR BODY.

In an ideal world, when a conflict starts to boil, you'd be able to leave the room, take ten deep breaths, meditate for five minutes, and walk around the block. But in the real world you almost never have that kind of opportunity. In the heat of a conflict, you need to be able to soothe yourself quickly in order to move into the second step.

Here are some ways to practice Anchor 1:

- First and foremost, shut up. For a few seconds, don't say anything no matter how much you might want to, or how much you have to say, or how loudly someone else is yelling. Just breathe.
- If you're holding something, let it go or put it down.
- Sit down. Put your hands in your lap or on your knees.
- Mentally tell yourself, *Stay calm or Keep it together or (my own favorite) Calm the fuck down.*
- Quickly find an internal resource your body experiences as safe, soothing, or pleasurable. Think of this person, place, r animal, and quickly connect to it. For a few seconds, experience this resource (as a sensation, or image, or emotion, or impulse, or vibration).
- Go to the bathroom. Seriously. Say, "I need to use the bathroom. I'll be right back"; then go in and close the door. I know this sounds silly, but in many situations, it's the best way to get two minutes alone to catch your breath and move into Anchor 2. If you just walk away or say, "I

need to be alone for a minute," someone might get pissed off or come after you. But they probably won't follow you into the toilet. (Be sure to return and re-engage after a few minutes.)
- Do something else to slow things down without dissing anyone or running away. Say, "Hang on, it's hot in here" and take off your sweater; take a long, slow drink from your mug; open or close a window; reach over and pet the cat.

ANCHOR 2: SIMPLY NOTICE THE SENSATIONS, VIBRATIONS, AND EMOTIONS IN YOUR BODY INSTEAD OF REACTING TO THEM.

This anchor is all about staying in the here and now. Here are some ways to do this:

- Pay attention to your body's experience of simply being in your clothes. Notice how and where your body touches your underwear, your shirt, your pants, your skirt, your socks or stockings, and your hat.
- Notice any other body sensations: your back against the chair, your tongue against the roof of your mouth, the wind blowing against your face. Experience and name each sensation: heat, cold, constriction, relaxation, hollowness, looseness, weakness, trembling.
- As thoughts and emotions and possible reactions arise, don't run off with them. Bring yourself back to your body and its sensations.

ANCHOR 3: ACCEPT THE DISCOMFORT-AND NOTICE WHEN IT CHANGES INSTEAD OF TRYING TO FLEE FROM IT.

At first this will be difficult, but with practice it will get easier. Here are some ways to practice this:

- When you feel an urge to tamp down or push away the discomfort, don't. Keep your attention focused directly on it. Stay with it and notice when it changes – because, if you don't flee from it, at some point it will.
- When you get the impulse to analyze or think about the discomfort, bring yourself back to the sensation of discomfort itself. Again, notice when it changes.
- When your mind spits out strategies for what to do next, don't grab onto them. Just sit with the discomfort. Notice when the speed, focus, or quality of your thoughts changes.
- When thoughts or images about the past or future pop up, let them float past you. 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 that discomfort is the foundation of healing.

ANCHOR 4: STAY PRESENT AND IN YOUR BODY AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THE UNFOLDING EXPERIENCE, WITH ALL ITS AMBIGUITY AND UNCERTAINTY, AND RESPOND FROM THE BEST PARTS OF YOURSELF.

Continue to use the first three anchors to stay in the present and in your body. At the same time, slowly move into the heat, peril, and possibility of the conflict. Feel your way, moment by moment. Here are some tips:

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- 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 what a jerk the other person is, use those 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 only honest response is *I don't know*, say, "I don't know."
- Don't try to wrest or finagle 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.

Anchor 4 always involves uncertainty. It can take many minutes, sometimes even hours, to play out.

There may be some situations especially during your first few months of practicing the five anchors when your lizard brain gets overwhelmed and you temporarily go bonkers. (This happens occasionally to almost everyone, including us therapists.)

If and when you do briefly lose your mind, it doesn't mean you've blown it, that it's too late, or that you might as well smash a window, go berserk, or blow your brains out. Exactly the opposite is true. Every new a new opportunity to catch yourself, come back to the here moment is and now, and settle your body.

Whenever you do lose your way or lose your mind go back to Anchor 1 and use it to soothe yourself and slow yourself down. Then move forward again into Anchors 2, 3, and 4.

ANCHOR 5: SAFELY DISCHARGE ANY ENERGY THAT REMAINS.

This anchor is underused and poorly understood, but it is no less important than the others. Use this anchor only after you have worked through the conflict, or disengaged from it, or agreed to stop focusing on it for now.

If you watch animals in the wild, you'll see that after a high- stress situation has passed, they'll instinctively discharge their built-up energy. A zebra that has just outrun a lion will vigorously shake itself or ripple the skin along its back. Other animals will roll on the ground or run in a circle or pick brief mock fights with each other.

After you have been in the heat of a conflict, its energy remains bottled up in your body. For your physical and emotional well- being, discharge it as soon as you reasonably can. Allow yourself to experience your body's natural defensive and protective urges — and then discharge them. Here are some good ways to do this:

- Most forms of exercise, including walking.
- Playing most sports.
- Dancing.
- Physical labor-heavy yard work, construction, snow shoveling, etc.
- Follow your body's moment-by-moment guidance. You might experience a sudden urge to push your hands in the air, or run around the block, or shake your head vigorously and shout. Let your body do whatever it wants to do. (Unless, of course, it wants to do something harmful,

such as putting a fist through the wall. In that case, discharge the energy in a harmless way by punching a cushion, for example.)

Here are some things that will *not* help:

- Playing sports that don't make you move your entire body for at least twenty consecutive minutes ping pong, golf, bowling, softball, etc.
- Doing yoga, tai chi, qigong, or meditation. These will stretch and/or relax you, but they will gather rather than disperse your energy.

You'll learn this process by going through it, time after time and experience after experience. Sometimes you'll make mistakes- perhaps even big ones. But, over time, you'll get better at using all of the five anchors, and at handling each part of the process as it unfolds.