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Review of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* by Resmaa Menakem

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As bodywork therapists, we have first-hand awareness of the wisdom Resmaa Menakem writes, that healing starts in the body. In [My Grandmother's Hands](#), he brings the conversation about race out of the head and into the body experience. He also points to the trauma that humans have experienced and inherited, that those traumas are impacting our cross-race relations, and the only way to change the culture of harm is to begin the path of healing ourselves first.

Not only is the reader of [My Grandmother's Hands](#) invited to understand the body's mechanisms that have perpetuated tension between white bodies, black bodies and police bodies, as Menakem calls them, but the book is written to engage in active participation along the way. Each chapter includes body practices that reveal the ways that our reflexes play a critical role in dynamics between members of each group, particularly when one feels unsafe. He writes, "our deepest emotions involve the activation of a single bodily structure: our soul nerve (or vagus nerve). This nerve is connected to our lizard brain, which is concerned solely with survival and protection. Our lizard brain only has four basic commands: rest, fight, flee, or freeze." In the presence of perceived threat (regardless of whether or not the threat actually exists), the body reacts from this survival response, which activates more quickly than the rational mind. In the book, Menakem offers "soul nerve training" practices – "practices in noticing your body, helping it settle, and working with your soul nerve." Once settled, a body that is more relaxed actually encourages other bodies nearby to relax and can engage in a stressful situation with greater cognitive faculty.

To what extent this is meaningful for bodywork therapists is beyond measure. Even at a time – perhaps especially – when touch is restricted, if not out of reach, we have the opportunity to begin cultural and generational healing by turning to our most beloved resource: the body, specifically our own. If we are ever to break the cycles of harm, to fully belong and support the belonging of those around us, we must take great care to turn inward and resolve to transform from the inside out. The guidance of [My Grandmother's Hands](#) provides fertile ground upon which we may rebuild a world we wish to inhabit.