

A Conversation on Compassion With Resmaa Menakem

Transcript of Resmaa Menakem on Why Healing Racism Begins With the Body

Introduction - music

Welcome to another episode of 'Conversations on Compassion'. I'm Leslie Langbert.

Today I am talking with author Resmaa Menakem. If you're in the Tucson area, you may recall that Resmaa was a featured author in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences tent at the Tucson Festival of Books this year. His book is called *My Grandmother's Hands* and it is a powerful resource around helping to heal the impact of trauma that has been inflicted by these systems of racial oppression that we are all living under, and have been for many generations in this country.

The powerful thing about his book is that it's written for several different audiences. It's written for persons of color; it is written for those of us in white bodies, and; there's a significant section for those who are working in law enforcement and police. Resmaa takes his training as a somatic therapist to really provide tools and ways for us to be able to come into noticing what we're holding- what we're carrying in our body, and how we can begin to heal that specifically around these patterns that we carry.

He's going to talk about that in more detail. I cannot recommend the book enough- it's really, really powerful. Resmaa and I are also talking today about compassion and I love the way that he describes it. I think you are too. He talks about it as being fierce and there's a tremendous sense of love and depth in that. We talk about why diversity programs, why cultural competency trainings, why the intellectual approaches to undoing racism are not working. Why they're not enough.

It's a really compelling conversation that is infused with hope and a lot of powerful truth. I hope that you enjoy this conversation.

Leslie: I'm hearing great things about *My Grandmother's Hands*.

Resmaa: Oh really?

Leslie: Yes! And since you were here, like, people coming up to me and they're like 'He was amazing and it's really awesome that you brought him here.' And I'm like, 'right?! He is amazing!' and yeah, I'm hearing from people that they're like bringing people together and not just reading the book but like, working the book and having conversations together.

Resmaa: That's it! That's it, exactly. That is my...That is what I believe is going to be...what I leave the earth with is that people realize that they're not defective, and that there are things they can do together, things that they can do apart and there's things that we can do to abolish the supremacy of the white body, and bring us you know, more towards you know, tapping into both our individual purpose and things we're supposed to bring to the earth, as well as the communal purpose and things that we're supposed to bring to the earth. So you know, I love hearing that stuff.

Leslie: Yeah it's so powerful. I was thinking about, you know, I come back, myself, I feel like *My Grandmother's Hands* is a companion for me for my entire life.

Resmaa: Wow. Hm!

Leslie: and yeah, there's always there's you know there's more layers. There's more deepening, you know, strengthening the container to hold all of it to gradually begin to undo the things that have been translated down in my own lineage, right? And I'm so struck too, by your book, and you, and your work and everything that's really held with such this powerful sense of compassion. And that I think is so powerful right now because I know in my own experience just seeing and hearing and reading about the brutality- the ways in which people have... seem to have kind of lost touch with humanity in some ways- that to hold that space of compassion and actually create a really powerful tool that says, 'so, I'm going to invite you to come in to do your healing', is really huge, and so I want to talk a little bit about your journey in coming to develop this work of *My Grandmother's Hands* but also the work that you're doing, you know with this being sort of a living, live teaching and work that you're doing in the world.

Resmaa: Yeah, yeah. So, so to me, compassion- compassion is not a milquetoast principle. When you say...when you say the word compassion in the kind of larger world, there almost this softened quality to it, right?

When you say you're... you know 'Resmaa', you know, 'you're very compassionate' or 'such and such you're compassionate', there is just kind of a lilting sense- this kind of soft aspect of it that comes along with saying somebody is compassionate and I look at it... I actually look at the word compassion and actually it's a very hard, robust principal, right? Part of the word compassion is passion, and passion has this kind of verve...this kind of energy... this kind of, right, let's do it, we got it... you know there's a real movement orientation to the word compassion I think a lot of times people miss, right?

There is a quality of conviction with compassion, right, that there is... that there is something to be done. And so when people say 'Resmaa'...you know, '*Grandmother's Hands* had a lot of compassion to it, it invited people into something' that, like you said you feel was missing, and what I would say is, is that part of what you picked up on in it was the inviting, but it was also the passion, it was also the purpose, it was also the conviction that you also tapped into as you as you were reading and processing and working, and that's the most important thing - working the book. Because the book is a working text. It is not a text that should be read, it is a worked text.

And so when I think about the term, when I think about compassion, I think about doing. I think about purpose. I think about practice. I think about moving. It is not just this soft, 'Oh I really care for you, and we're gonna hold hands and do Kumbaya, and walk down the street together, and look deep into each other's eyes' right?

Leslie: (laughs) Right!

Resmaa: When you're talking about real work around racial equity, racial trauma, historical trauma, all that different type of stuff, you better have something more to you than just flowers and rainbows and unicorns right! You better have something in you that will allow you to sustain going through the fire of that. Going through what it takes to burn- burn away all the inadequacy. Burn away the doubt. Burn into you some humbleness and some humiliation. You better have more than rainbows and unicorns when you're going through this.

And so my compassion, the way I think about compassion is really a working compassion. It is that I believe that every human being comes on the face of the earth with something, some unique gift that they have that they must bring into the world. You don't get to that by looking deeply into people's eyes only. You get to that by going through some stuff, by having stuff burn

away, and by getting your butt back up consistently every day working back to working towards that thing again. That's compassion to me.

Leslie: Yeah. It's fierce! That resonates so much. I mean, the practice of compassion as I understand it, too, is really about how do we get in and start to clear away the thought patterns, the behaviors, the things that are conditioned that actually creates and sustains suffering. How do we get in and do that.

Resmaa: Right...

Leslie: And, yeah I love what you're saying about your book being a working book. Whenever I have been talking with people about it and saying you know you need to get a copy of this, I really emphasize it's not a book that you read it's actually a book that you work. That you know, you make a commitment to and you carve out time and you get in and you uncover and have to learn how to be with or you can you know sort of feel like you can bypass instead of transform.

Resmaa: Yep! That's right.

Leslie: You know, one of the things that I want to have you speak to is this notion- this, this idea -and I know this comes up a lot in conversations that I have with other white folks is this sense of like, wanting other people to get right, you know? So, seeing behaviors and you know, feeling that anger and being like you know, 'I want other people to get right' but sort of bypassing, you know, the piece that is like what is it with me that is asking to be healed and transformed.

Resmaa: Exactly. So... so, white people got that stuff bad. They got that stuff baadd. There is a racial hierarchy that happens in white communities, in white culture, especially those that see themselves as progressive and liberal. One of the first things that happens is that when you get white people...first of all, white people don't want to be in a room with each other. Especially when you start to talk about race stuff. They all want a...they want a person of color in the room to quote/unquote hold them accountable, right?

And without taking into account the amount of racial battle fatigue that happens when you... when people of color have to do that type of emotional labor. And what I feel is the most important thing is that white bodies have to begin to get into a room with each other, deal with the uncomfortableness, deal with the hierarchy that starts to show up, deal with all the brutality that starts to happen with each other's bodies

and then figure out how they're gonna develop culture all around beginning to heal that over time, right?

Because what ends up happening is that when white bodies get into a room, they start to begin to do this thing that a colleague of mine, Rachel March says is elite-ification. White people love being the most 'woke' white person in the room. They love being the most strategy-oriented white person in the room. They all love being the most articulate white person in the room. But when that fire starts to burn, and you start to start thinking about how we 'be' as opposed to how do we 'do'....now, all of those intellectual ideas are either going to blow you out of the room, or blow you closer together to make you to begin to create a container by which all of those reactions can occur in.

And so one of the most important things for white bodies in particular, is to come together without people of color, right? To come together and begin to do that grinding work, right, and then as they begin to do that grinding work begin to see are there people who can, not come in and teach them, but people who they can begin to have relationships with, after they have been going through some type of process and type of burning.

I think that that people of color have to do the same thing because we have ingested the idea that the white body is the supreme standard of humanity also. So even within our own cultures, across cultures, across communities of color, there is this anti-blackness that's woven into things. There is...these racial pieces there but I want to be clear the standard is still white body supremacy even when I am damaging people of color. Even when people of color are damaging me. There is this subtext, or the standard that the white body is still the standard by which we're doing this stuff to each other through.

There's a white spoken word artist that I heard the other day, and he said something else that made my brain kinda go 'click!' and go 'yeah, that's it!' One of the things that he says is that when it comes to white people, and he's talking about his own people, when it comes to white people, it's important to realize that white body supremacy is the water, not the shark.

And many times progressives are always looking for the Trump shark, or the KKK shark, or the Mike Pence shark, right, they're looking for the shark, right, but not the fact that they are steeped in the water. And when white progressives put themselves on this continuum of, you got Trump's over there and you got 'good' white people over here, what is happening is they forget that that continuum that they're on, the one that says they're a good one is actually a sliding continuum.

Leslie: Right.

Resmaa: It is not a fixed continuum. It slides. And when white progressives...this is something that Jim White has been saying lately, is that progressive white supremacy is as damaging as devout white supremacy. What I mean by devout white supremacy is that those who are so dedicated and devout to the destruction of people of color. Those are the devout ones, right? But the progressive ones, that insidious type of white body supremacy...that even though they say they don't believe in white body supremacy, they are steeped in white body supremacy and those notions of who black people are in relation to who they are is still steeped in white body supremacy.

And if that goes unexamined, they continue to wound people of color, and then feign...and then won't take responsibility for that wounding. So part of it for me is that when it comes to healing this thing about white body supremacy, white bodies have to begin to get together to figure out how they're gonna create a container, a cultural container by which they can begin to develop culture to begin to actually attack it.

White body supremacy...the abolishment of white body supremacy, currently as it stands...white people have no notion how to begin to deal with that culturally. They have a notion around segregation. They have a notion around assimilation. They have no notion around abolishing white body supremacy, or racism, or anti-racist things. They have strategy around it, but not culture.

The KKK, the devout racists, have a culture. They have symbols, they have colors, they have music, they have dance, ways of speaking, ways of standing, ways of being, all that different type of stuff. What does the white liberal have other than strategy and a racial resume, right? And if I'm a fourteen year-old white boy, having music and symbols and a shared historical understanding, even if I know that the shared historical understanding is abhorrent, I still have something that speaks to me more so than picketing, and sitting around, you know, something that I'm protesting. That does not sustain culture. And until white liberals begin to actually develop a culture around anti-racist, abolishing, somatically abolishing white body supremacy, until they begin to think about this as a culture and less about this as a strategy, they will continue to re-wound people of color.

Leslie: It speaks to, to me, this...the roots of talking about that there's strategy but there's not a culture around it, one of the pieces so powerful in the way that you open the book is talking about so where did

this deep trauma begin? And talking about how the dismembering of bodies, the trauma that happened for many of the ancestors of white Americans whose families you know immigrated here... and you use the term that I think is so powerful about the unresolved trauma being 'blown through bodies' when they arrived. And when you're talking about this lack of culture to hold it, it makes me wonder if that's such a big piece – that idea that when folks immigrated here, in order to assimilate, to have access to economic opportunities, that there was a gradual, or sometimes maybe even relatively quickly, this loss of language, of connection to the homeland...

Resmaa: Yeah!

Leslie: And there may be even like a desire you know, to leave that behind if it was deeply painful but all of it is sort of undigested...undigested trauma that ended up coming out and still continues to come out in all these different ways and a lot of them are quite subtle. I think which is part of what you're talking about. There's clearly you know the things that are very profound, that are violent...that are very overt, but there is this whole we're looking for the shark but it's you know, fish don't see the water they swim in. That's the subtlety, yeah?

Resmaa: I would tweak the word 'subtle', and make it 'decontextualized'. That time decontextualizes trauma. All it takes is the march of time, and the thing that wounded you or hurt you becomes less... become more... you lose the context, right? Um, you know one of the things I think about when I think about white folks is the idea that, um, when you look at the Dark and Middle Ages, and this is just one moment in time that I've looked at right. That's how I kind of framed it. People might go back to other things, all that deflects stuff. For me, the Middle Ages is an important time for white people, even though we know that the Middle Ages was not just white people, right? That's the myth, right? Whenever you look at all of these things like Harry Potter, and Game of Thrones, and all that different type of stuff, you'd swear that there was no black people in the Middle Ages!

Leslie: It's so screwed up...

Resmaa: It was all really thin white people, with big blue eyes, and you know, bright teeth, and anyway, so..so the reality is that the Middle Ages was a particularly brutal time for Europe, right. So when I'm looking at things, I'm looking at the five brutalities, right? Colonialism. Enslavement. Genocide. Imperialism and land theft, right. And when I look at those five brutalities and I apply those five brutalities to Europe, those

things along with, along with public dismemberment...along with rapes, along with Inquisitions...along with The Crusades, along with famine, along with plague, along with....a lot, a lot, a lot of brutality existed. And that existed from about 500 A.D. to approximately 1500 [A.D.], right?

Then we start moving into the Enlightenment and all these other things, right. But during that time you're talking about a thousand years of elite white bodies destroying less elite white bodies, right. Destroying people, taking people's lands, committing genocide. All of that different type of stuff was happening for a thousand years on that body, right? And then, in 1492 that body. Came. Here.

And one of the things we know about trauma is that trauma becomes decontextualized and over time can look like culture. And over time can look like family traits. And over time can look like personality. And once that body came here with all that brutality, I believe when they saw the first Indigenous people, no matter how beautiful, how nice, how much these people who wanted to help, no matter how much they did help, that trauma could only see those people as something to be conquered and made into noble savages, right. Made into Christians, because that's what happened to them, right?

That you had to take all that energy and blow it through and so now it looks like culture or it looks like you know, the doctrine of discovery, you know, 'we're just discovering these people'. And you don't even see the people. And so all of that trauma that never got settled, that never got dealt with, that never got metabolized now gets blown through every thing that you see. The people, the land, the environment, understanding. Everything gets blown through and needs to be manipulated.

Now. That's 1492. Then, in 1619 you bring the first enslaved Africans to this country, right? And what I tell people all the time is that, the idea of the white body being the supreme standard by which all bodies of humanity shall be measured...that idea, and the operationalization of it existed before America became America, right? So in 1619 America was not America, America was a colony. And I think it's interesting that America was a colony because what that means to me is that colonies are filled with colonized people, right? We forget that piece when we talk about the thirteen colonies. That they were filled with colonized people.

We know what we mean by 'colonized people'. So one of the things that happens is, when in 1619, the Africans, the enslaved Africans come here, it is not until 1680, even though the white body supremacy was operationalized before that, in 1680 is the first time we begin to see the idea

of, in Virginia law, the idea of 'white persons', right. That's when you start to see those things...that word 'white person'. Not 'landholding person', not 'persons with property', right? But, 'white person'.

And the moment that that was ensconced in law, you, at that moment, ushered in white body supremacy. That white body was the supreme...Now you have hierarchies in that, right, but the white body, in comparison to other bodies, was the standard and is the standard of humanity, right? And so once that happened, once the creation of the white body and the supremacy of the white body was established and even poor white people were able to take advantage of it... at that moment the antithesis was all also created, right? So if you have the white body as the standard of humanity you must have something that is not the standard of humanity, or juxtaposed to that standard. And anti-blackness and the black body has always been that antithesis.

It's why when no matter what culture you talk about, the darker the people are in that culture, the more they're compared to monkeys, the more they're compared to primates, right? That is not an accident. That is the antithesis of humanity and humanity is... the measurement of humanity is the white body.

But so now I just said all of that, and, you have another hundred years to 1776 - before America actually becomes America, right? So all of what I've just said is in the soil of America, and the soil is seeded with that understanding. And so when you have somebody like Trump now, who is a devout racist, right? Different from the passive or the progressive racist- still on the same sliding continuum- but what he does is voice what's actually in the soil, right? And so when he says 'go back to where you come from' to these four women of color, right, what he's speaking to is what's in the soil of America. So even though his people didn't come...even though my people have been here...maybe have been here since before the 1600's, right? Even though indigenous people have been here for millennia right? What's in the soil that the white man and the white body is standard.

So when you say something as a person of color that pushes against your notion that everything is cool and everything is equitable, your genuflect is that I am the standard. I get to determine, as a devout racist, white bodied man, who stays, who goes, and I have dominion over every... and have access to every body, and when I mean body I mean body that exists. That's in the water. That's not the shark, that's the water.

He's speaking to that ethos. And what people do is that they clutch their pearls and not see that there's actually really articulated knowledge that

he's bringing forth. Not knowledge that I want to teach, but knowledge in terms of the ethos, in terms of what is in the soil of America. And so in some ways, the devout racist that Trump is, and everybody that he's filled his Cabinet with, right, the government with...this devout racism is within the soil. He's voicing it, where passive-aggressives will never voice it, but it is still in the soil that they can take advantage of, right?

And so to me, this idea of how we look at race, racism and trauma, because white supremacy is trauma.

Leslie: Right.

Resmaa: It is a traumatizing, organizing principle of America. If we don't begin to understand it in that context, then we will look at it as incidental as opposed to foundational.

Music

Leslie: When we come back from this pause, Resmaa talks about building resiliency and why radical self-care and self-discipline are essential to strengthening it. Stay with us.

Music

Leslie: One of the things that struck me so much and this is I feel like you're bringing us to this part now is like this contextualizing of the bigger picture and what's in the soil and then bringing it back to the individual. And there's been so much... so many different models and strategies around how to dismantle racism. There's you know these different initiatives around equity and inclusion and diversity and all of these different things that sound great, and they're well-intentioned, but they stay up here in the realm of the mind...in the head. So bringing this into -using somatics, coming into the body, using your skill as a trauma therapist to actually begin to offer these ways and being able to heal the body... I want to speak to that but I don't I don't want this to be... obviously this on...there's so much work for those of us that are in white bodies to like really get in and do this and look at that and explore that healing, so I do want to touch on that.

But I also want to touch on speaking to our brothers and sisters that are out there...from your....from what you want to say, what you want to offer from your heart around what's brought you to do this and how those that are on the receiving end most direly can use these tools to sustain, to strengthen resilience, can continue to honor, and to stand strong.



Resmaa: Yeah. So, first of all I want to say to those who are out here in the trenches and doing this work that if you never hear this from anyone else, I want you to hear this from me: you are not defective. You are not wrong. You are not crazy. Something is happening and has continued to happen to your people, and the work that you're trying to do is important, is necessary. And, your self-care it is so important, and I want to say something about the self-care piece. I'm not talking about going to get a massage, right? To me, self-discipline is self-love. Your ability to have some self-discipline around what it takes for you to have a sense that you are whole, good and that you matter is about having the self-discipline to take care of yourself daily. And giving yourself what you need, consistently every day, even when you don't feel like it, to do that daily.

So I just want to say to all my brothers and sisters that are doing it; you are not defective and we have to figure out both individually and collectively and communally how to bring more self-discipline to ourselves so that we continue to stay into the fight. Right?

I do want to say something about the words diversity and inclusion and there's another one that's been I've been hearing lately. It just makes me roll my eyes. It's cultural agility.

Leslie: That's a new one for me.

Resmaa: Yeah yeah it's a new one. I've just been hearing it a lot in circles. Cultural agility. Not how do we begin to look at and develop somatic abolitionist communities, right. Not how do we begin to confront and abolish white body supremacy and develop anti-racist communities. Not that! Let's become more 'culturally agile' right. All of these terms, are terms that make passive, white body progressives supremacists...make them feel better, right?

Because none of those will acknowledge genocide. Diversity does not... cultural diversity does not usually acknowledge genocide. Does not usually acknowledge land theft. Or colonialism, or imperialism or enslavement. It usually doesn't acknowledge those, right? One of the things I want to impart is that when we talk about these terms, these terms have a particular cultural context, right. And they usually don't fit the context of the people that have been genocided. They usually don't fit the context of the people that have been enslaved, right?

And so what I want to say is this: whenever somebody says to me diversity, the next question is, if you're creating a different culture not just a strategy but a different culture, the next question that should come up in you, in your

vessel, in your very somatic, in your body, should be the question 'diverse from what?'

Because when you talk about diversity what you're saying is there is a standard and we're bringing something in diversifying from that standard, right? That's what diversity means. Diversity either means bring something in to have some more flexibility, or to move away from - diversified, right? So when we say diversity we never ask the question: 'From what?' And all know we all know it. We all know it. We intrinsically know but if you never landed, never say, when we say diversity. we're saying we are diversifying from the standard that the white body is the supreme standard of humanity. And we want to bring in other things. That's what we mean. But we never say that.

So what diversity ends up being as a genuflect is food, music, identity right, that's what it ends up being other than saying we are diversifying from the standard of white people being the standard of humanity. That's what we mean we say diversity. Same thing with inclusion. What are we...so if you're going to include something in, right, you must start with something first. Who's doing the including, like what are you bringing in, like what..

Leslie: What are you keeping out?

Resmaa: Yeah! What are you keeping out, and what is the standard for like, if you start with inclusion that we want to include something you're saying that that there is a standard by which you're bringing something into. What is the standard by which we're bringing something in to? We're including these other communities and cultures and in to this standard of the white body being the standard, right? So, so, as people who are developing culture, we have to talk differently. We have to be differently. That being and talking differently in that language has to come up out of culture.

if you don't start with the container which you can begin to have these reactions begin to occur in, then you never, ever begin to create a culture, and white...what ends up happening is that the white bodies who are out here doing the work...what ends up happening is that they end up not being able to sustain the work. Because the moment they start getting pushback, they're using the same language and the same tone, and the same quality in their somatic body, the same vibratory response. They have not calibrated any differently, so their body experiences without challenge, the same as somebody who's not doing the work - as the devout racists, as the passive racists. There is no culture change, so they don't enter into the world

differently. Even if they're out here doing strategy. That's the thing about building the cultural container.

If you don't do it, and you're not up against other bodies, and you're not loving other white bodies, and you're not creating culture around other white bodies and you're not speaking a different language, you will genuflect to the language that currently is standard. And the current language that is standard is a racist understanding. It's a racist ideology. It is in the soil. It was here before America became America.

The five countries- the five superpowers- that created the slave trade right, were Dutch, French, English Portuguese and Spain, right? Those five countries existed before they participated in the enslavement trade. So they have some other reference point in terms of them as a culture that they can go to before this, right? America did not. America is steeped and was born up out the enslavement and the genocide, right? The other cultures had that, but in terms of the racialized component of it and the anti-blackness component of it, that is the unique structure...and then once that was developed, once that idea of whiteness and the white body being the supreme standard, it then exported that to the other parental countries, right? Because it has utility.

If I see a white person and then I see a black person, there is this shorthand that exists in the soil that says that one is more human than the other. That has utility in all of the other countries. That has utility in Spain. That has utility in England, in Britain. That has utility in Dutch [society], you see what I mean? So the progeny of the idea of the white body being the supreme standard has utility even in the parental countries, right?

So when I'm thinking about these pieces around what happens to the people that are out here doing this work...this is why I believe that the people are always doing this work have to create culture and have to create for themselves both communal and individual ways of developing self-discipline in order to compound the self-love that it's gonna take to do this work.

Leslie: Yeah we can't think our way... think ourselves into changing these systems that really comes down to this...The beauty to me of the work that you're that you're offering is framing In a very easy to understand way what happens to our bodies, what happens to our nervous systems when we take in experiences that are ours, but also you know really speaking to what we're learning from epigenetics around how trauma is translated and how our bodies actually can react in ways that are unexpected, that we may not have a particular context for, and then there's this reactive behavior that

often times leads us to either feeling actual threat or actual violence to another body.

Resmaa: That's right.

Leslie: I want to spend a little bit of time talking about some of the...some of the ways, some of the exercises, some of the ways that you brought this in to *My Grandmother's Hands* and how that has resonated so strongly for you as the gift to offer for us to begin to undo this within our own bodies that then can hopefully transform personality and family dynamics and eventually culture.

Resma: So, this is why I say this is a working text because the practices are practices that I'm really encouraging people to do... so I'm telling people that in terms of *My Grandmother's Hands*, you have to go through that you know at least four, five, six times, because the practices, all of the practices you do individually, right? So you read the book, you do the practices, and you're just like okay, wow. But then, if you do that practice now with a dyad, right, with another person, and you actually have them witnessing you doing the practice, and then you witness them doing practice, something else then begins to occur, right?

Then if you do the practices and you do it as a triad, where you have now, you're doing the practice, you have somebody witness you and somebody observing both of you as you're doing the practices, now there's a depth that begins to come into play that there is vulnerability that shows up when you do that. They are all these could be reflexive, protective mechanisms that begin to show up, and in that heat that gets turned up, you have to begin to learn how to language it, and learn how to manage it, and learn how to metabolize it. And that happens in real time.

And if you keep getting reps around it all of a sudden you notice you have more room by which you can begin to both sustain and to manage all these energies that show up, and starting to move through this racially, right?

And so for me, *My Grandmother's Hands*...the real beauty in it, is really about how you begin to use the book to scale up, right, and each time you learn something new about yourself. And I think about it as...I call it the suffering's edge, or the burning's edge, right? Is that is that all of the intellect that you have pales in comparison to your survival stuff. And if you never get rest around how to manage the survival stuff, not just overriding but managing it, what happens is that you have a unique perspective that says to you 'I've learned everything that I need to



learn' that 'I've got everything I need ...that I need to get' but something about this work pushes you to begin to say, 'Oooh! I just discovered a new edge' (laughs). 'I just discovered a new learning's edge that I thought I had already dealt with. That I thought...or that I didn't even know that those reflexes were in me'. Those vibratory reflexes, those image and thought reflexes, those meaning reflexes, those behavioral reflexes, those affective feeling reflexes, those sensational reflexes, right?

That all of those pieces are important for me and now I'm learning something because I'm continuing to go through the reps. And I get stronger and learn, and get more space in my nervous system and more growth in my nervous system, so I can grow even more. That happens with My Grandmother's Hands because I'm pushing people in the book to slow down. It happens...I have a website, resmaa dot com, R-E-S-M-A-A dot com, and on my website I have some classes, right? Because I want people to if they want to access it through the book, cool. If they want to access it through the audio, cool. If they want to access it through having a class, and looking at some of the classwork, they can access there.

This is all about getting people to realize that in that suffering's edge...so what I say is that, when you're walking towards the key, and towards the fire, and when you're walking towards...I kinda look at it in my mind's eye, I kinda see it as like a burning sun. And as you walk towards the sun, the closer you walk towards the sun, the more you sweat, right? The more you begin to question 'Am I going in the right direction?' This is getting awfully hot, right? The more you start to stink. The more you start to think about things that you thought you had dealt with, the more boredom starts to set in, the more questioning, the more physical pain you start to experience, the more you walk towards the sun, the more that begins to happen simply because you take one step, and then you take another step. And one of the things that happens is that you begin to learn what you thought your limitations were and what they actually are, right?

And as you move closer to that thing, what happens is, is that the heat starts to both bring these things up, and also starts to begin to force you to get strong. It forces you develop to develop language. It forces you to begin to develop what I call a more fortified mind It forces you to thicken your skin. It forces you at the same time that you develop a fortified mind, and your skin begins to thicken, it also forces you to balance that with a flexible heart, right?



As you walk closer. The other thing that it does is burns away...it burns away things like inadequacy. It burns in humbleness. It burns away self-doubt. Because the more...the closer you get towards that sun, the more of yourself begins to be revealed and that begins to burn away. And this is so important for white people as it relates to race, right? As it relates to race more the burning... the burning fire for white people is to walk towards race, and towards creating a cultural container both communally and individually, so more of their self can be burned away.

One of the things that happens with many white folks is one of the first things that happened when they got here is that they freely gave up their name and their language. It was burned out of my people, right? You know, it was you know... and so part of what has to happen is that white folks have to go and reclaim, right? Not just as, but specifically around how race was set up for them to give that up freely, right. And so one of the things that I believe is that when you're going through that fire, and the doubt and everything is starting to happen...one of the things that also happens for us is that we know that all we have to do to stop the pain, is to just stop moving.

That if we stop walking towards the fire, the burning will stop. I won't sweat as much if I just stop. And you're absolutely right, you actually will feel better. You actually will get all of the...all of the things that were being taken from you because you're speaking up, because you're doing things, because you're speaking a different language. Because you're developing a different culture. All of that stuff, all of that cascading away will begin to stop. And, what will happen is that all of the doubt and all of the pieces...and all of the inadequacies, now all that stuff that was being burned away now congeals, right?

And if you want to even ...if you want to begin to take more pain away, all you gotta do is take a step backwards. And now all of a sudden you've taken a step backwards and now the heat is not so intense. So you take another step backwards and it's even less intense, right? And this is the difference between clean pain and dirty pain - is that now you take backwards you also know you experienced the dirtiness of. And now... and now you take another step back and now you move out to Oregon and cut your white dreads off, and you marry another white boy or white woman and now nobody knows that you was in the trenches, and you were building something else, right?

But you also understand what dirty feels like, right? You understand, and nothing's going wrong, you just have now decided that the gifts that

you were supposed to bring into the world? You're now gonna die with, and you're alright with it. You're alright with the gifts that you were supposed to bring into the world, to change things, you're alright with now dying with those gifts, and those gifts dying around you looking at you, as you die at ninety seven, right?

You know that you're gifts that you were supposed to bring into the world are now dying with you, and you know that you made a conscious effort to do that. So this is why I'm saying if you don't have a community, and you don't have people, that you're building a container with, then all you're doing is building strategy. What I tell white people when they say 'well I'm doing this, and I'm doing that, I'm doing this and I'm doing that', I say, I'm not asking who your book club is. I'm not asking what your affinity group is. I'm asking who your people are and if you can tell me what that is you just...you're just doing you're just doing strategy.

Leslie: Resmaa, every time we talk, I feel like I want to talk with you for hours and hours. I come away with so much to take in and process and digest. I'm always inspired and I'm so grateful to you for helping me, and helping all of us that work with *My Grandmother's Hands* to help us move toward that that fire and to transform it. You are a beautiful man.

Resmaa: (Laughs) Aww! Thank you. Hey this is this is my life's work, this is my life's purpose. This is very, very clear to me. You know, I think about my ancestors and I think about Fannie Lou Hamer. I think about James Baldwin, I think about sister Lorde. I think about all of the people who have said exactly the same things that I've said in much more eloquent ways.

And all I'm doing is standing... is really just standing beside them, standing on their shoulders, and articulating something that my people have been saying, you know, for hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of years and so it's just my... it's my little grain in the sand. And so, I'm just very grateful that people are listening. I'm grateful that people are doing something with it, and I'm grateful more than anything that people who are reading the book and are engaging with me and other people, you know, that they are realizing that they're not crazy. They're not defective and the work that they're doing is a beautiful work. They're bringing their gifts in and it does matter. So, that's the way I think about this.

Leslie: Thank you so much.

Resmaa: Thank you. Talk to you soon.

Music

closing

Leslie: Friends, I highly, highly recommend getting a copy of My Grandmother 's Hands. It is an amazing tool and amazing resource and if you want to learn more about Resmaa's really powerful work, visit his website Resmaa dot com. That's spelled R-E-S-M-A-A dot com.

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Music