

Soothing Your Soul Nerve

Selected from *My Grandmother's Hands*, by Resmaa Menakem

Engage these exercises with a spirit of play, try them out, see how/if they help you feel calmer and more grounded. Most of these are familiar, even every day, activities. And practicing them intentionally, and with curiosity, can help build a reservoir of practices you can draw from when you need them.

Important: If any of these activities triggers extreme panic or a fight, flight, or freeze response in your body, stop doing it. Orient to the windows and doors in the room. Wrap yourself in a blanket, drink a glass of water. Before doing that activity again, seek out a safe, knowledgeable person to guide you through it, or witness you in the activity—preferably a well-trained somatic therapist who works with trauma.

HUMMING

- Focus your attention on the center of your belly, behind your navel.
- Breathe in and out, deeply and slowly, a few times. Feel your belly pull the air all the way down into it.
- On the fourth or fifth exhalation, hum a low, even tone.
- Inhale naturally and repeat this a few times, varying your pitch with each new exhalation. • Do this for two or three minutes.
- Then stop and notice what your body experiences afterward. What has changed from before you started humming? What has stayed the same? What sensations, thoughts, and images are arising?
- What does your body want to do now? Does it want to move? Hum some more? Run and hide? Fight?
- Without doing anything else, just notice whatever your body is experiencing right now.

Alternative: Pick a song with a simple melody that feels comforting to your body. It can be anything—a hymn, a gospel tune, a lullaby, a military march, a punk rock song. Hum it all the way through from beginning to end from your belly. When you're done, stop and pay attention to your body. Feel free to experiment with a variety of tunes.

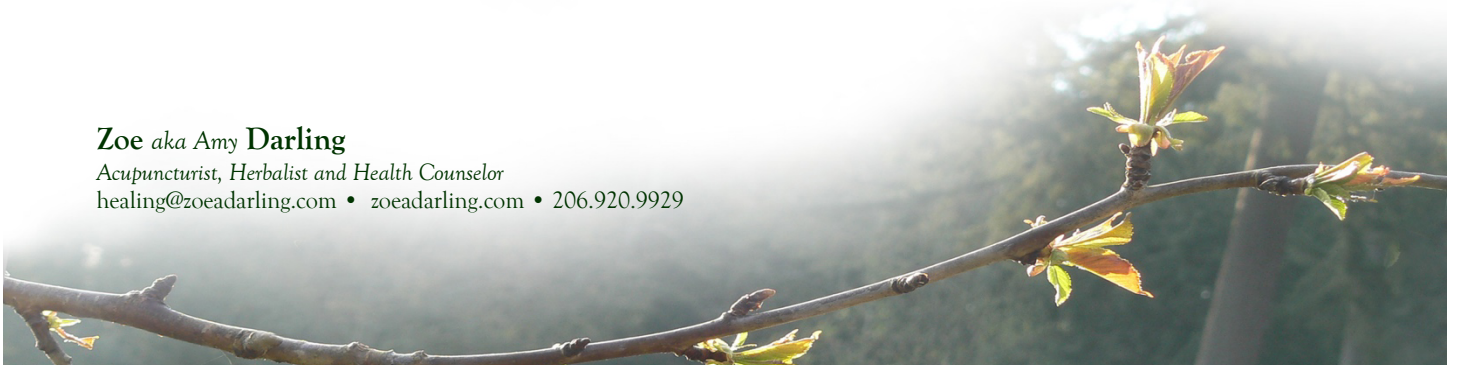
BUZZING

- Get comfortable. Take a few deep, slow breaths. Focus your attention behind your navel. • Relax your shoulders. Rest your tongue gently behind the top row of your teeth. Relax your jaw and let your mouth hang open.
- Breathe out slowly and firmly. As you exhale, make a buzzing sound, like a bee. Extend the buzz and the exhalation as long as you can without discomfort.
- Repeat for two to three minutes. Then stop and notice what you experience in the body. • Experiment with different tones, volumes, and vibrations until you find some that feel the most comfortable.

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BELLY BREATHING

- Focus your attention on the center of your belly, behind your navel.
- Breathe in and out, deeply and slowly, a few times. Pull the air all the way down into your belly. • Keep breathing, deeply and slowly. Follow your breath as it flows in through your nose, down your throat, into and through your lungs, and into your belly. Keep following it as it flows back out again. (You won't actually pull air into your belly, of course, but it will feel that way.) • Continue breathing this way for four to five minutes.
- Stop and notice what you experience in your body.

SLOW ROCKING

- Get comfortable and take a few slow, deep breaths. 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.
- Feel free to experiment with standing versus sitting; with rocking side to side versus forward and back; with a range of different (but always slow) speeds; and with sitting in a variety of seats and positions. Discover what feels best to your body.
- When you are done, stop and notice what your body is experiencing.

Alternative: Keep your body still, but let your head and neck rock slowly from side to side.

RUBBING YOUR BELLY

- Get comfortable and take a few deep breaths. Let your shoulders relax.
- Place your palm on the center of your belly, just above your navel. Press in gently. Hold your hand in place for a moment or two.
- Then, slowly rub your belly for three to four minutes, in whatever way feels good to your body. • When you're done, pay attention to all the sensations in your body.
- You can do this with or without clothes, but remove any heavy outerwear.

Alternative 1: Rub the center of your breastbone.

Alternative 2: Rub your solar plexus—your center of gravity, halfway between your breastbone and your navel.

20's

- Get comfortable. Slowly rotate your foot at the ankle twenty times in either direction. If you like, move it in one direction; pause for ten seconds; then rotate it in the opposite direction. • Do this with each ankle, one at a time, pausing for ten seconds in between each set of rotations. • Then do the same for each knee; for your hips; for each wrist; for each elbow; and for each shoulder. Pause for ten seconds after each set of rotations.
- Sometimes trauma energy can get stuck in the joints. These rotations help to release that energy.

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