

THE ART OF BEING PRESENT

giving and receiving breema bodywork
feels great—but that's almost beside the point

BY SUZANNE GERBER

It's hard to wrap your mind around Breema. At first, this approach to mind/body unity appears to resemble more familiar types of bodywork: To a casual observer it can look a bit like Thai massage, Shiatsu or Ortho-Bionomy. Yet once you experience it and start to learn about its underlying philosophy, you realize that Breema body-

work (and Self-Breema) isn't like anything you've ever seen, felt or done.

While there's no such thing as a standard Breema session, it usually, but doesn't always starts with the recipient lying on her back, fully clothed, on a rug or futon. Before laying on hands, the practitioner first gets in touch with his breath and the weight of his own

body. He may then hold the recipient's feet and move her body around in a gentle yet firm way, working his way up the body. But there is no prescribed order, and there are no rules. Owing to the hundreds of hours of experience practicing Breema—and by being fully present in his own body—the practitioner will simply know



Breema can have a transformative effect on your body, mind and feelings and support a receptivity and openness to life.

es us to participate fully in life and to see that everything that happens is part of existence manifesting.”

THE PRACTICE OF BREEMA

Unlike Swedish massage, which is orchestrated to end at the head after 60 or 90 minutes, a Breema session can last anywhere from 20 minutes to close to one hour. “When I started doing Breema professionally, I would do an hour to an hour and a half,” says Schreiber. “But over the years, without making any ‘decisions,’ it got shorter and shorter. Now, I don’t have a set time: I work



The rhythmic movements, stretches and postures create a deep experience of natural comfort.

A BREEMA SESSION

Well, of course I had to experience Breema firsthand. The Breema Center introduced me to Mary-Beth Charno, a Breema instructor and practitioner, yoga teacher and holistic oncological nurse based on Long Island. As we drive to her home for the session, I ask her how people find her, given that there are only a few hundred people practicing Breema, and *why* they come, when it sounds to me like Breema is more about the practitioner using the nine principles to raise his or her awareness of the connection of body, mind and feelings and become more present in everyday life.

“People usually tell me that they came across a flyer or hear about it through word of mouth. There’s an atmosphere that’s relayed and comes alive when it’s communicated,” Mary-Beth tells me. “A person gets a taste of it and wants to know more. So they end up seeking out a way to receive the treatment. I think they recognize a nonjudgmental atmosphere because Breema is nondiagnostic. They feel very nurtured and it’s almost as if it speaks to the recipient’s essential self.”

She goes on to talk about the allure of a system that doesn’t try to “fix” anything. “If I were coming at this from a diagnostic point of view,” she explains, “I’d be assessing how your body is: Is there something going on in the hip joint, should I lean in more...? In Breema it’s not that I’m not concerned, but if I come back to the principle of Mutual Support, the essence will show me how much to lean. Feedback I get is that people really enjoy having the opportunity to feel balanced, relaxed, nurtured and supported.”

At her home, she leads me upstairs to a room

designed for bodywork and yoga. I lie on a futon, wearing the loose clothes I came in, including socks. She asks if there’s anything to know about my body, then explains she’ll start by placing her hands on my feet, working her way up to my head. When her hands leave my body, she says, the session is done. She starts by holding my feet, then raising them one at a time, first my left, then my right. Immediately I am filled with a sense of trust and the feeling that I can “let go”: The way she moves my body is slow, gentle, controlled, rhythmic, supported, guided and flowing. There’s never a pause but never a push. It feels like my body is doing the moving itself.

At times she turns a leg, putting me into a gentle side twist. Sometimes she taps my leg, sometimes brushes it, sometimes uses her hands, sometimes her own soft-socked feet. There’s a tenderness to the movements. She crisscrosses my body, stepping over me, and as she slowly works her way up toward my chest and head, I feel the problems I came in stressed-out over grow smaller and feel further away from the present. Toward the end she sits behind me and gently raises my shoulders one at a time and slides her feet under them, putting me in the gentlest backbend while she cradles my head in her hands. I am conscious the whole time but relaxed. I have no “visions” of color or energy moving, just of a “dropping down.” She ends by crossing my arms over my chest and stepping away. When I sit up, I am profoundly relaxed and calm. Things feel slower, clearer and more in focus. My mind is impressively empty of thoughts, except for one: I need more of this. —S.G.