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Breema: Parenting with the Nine Principles of Harmony

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Abstract: The practice of Breema offers support for intentional parenting by providing practical tools for being present in everyday activities and interactions by unifying body, mind, and feelings. This article provides background and examples for how using simple principles such as *No Judgment, Firmness, and Gentleness*, and *No Hurry/No Pause* in daily life offers a means for self-care in the midst of a hectic day. This can provide an invaluable tool for modeling positive behaviors for children and offers the potential to be nourished, rather than drained, by the events of daily life.

Keywords: parenting, family systems, birth

Supporting children to develop into conscientious adults can be an exercise in finding balance. We wish them to be independent, to connect with others, and to excel at extracurricular activities, while still succeeding in school. They are coming of age in a digital society, while learning how to be thoughtful, caring members of a community. In the mountain of literature on childrearing, one can easily feel unclear about which direction to take. We can become caught in ideological or cultural paradigms that don't meet the specific needs of the family. In reality, there

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are as many acceptable ways to raise children as there are individual parents.

We are all born with an instinctive, inner wisdom which can be covered up by life's external influences on us. By developing the skills to come back to the body, we can learn to re-connect with that wisdom. These skills offer the potential to clarify the aim of "intentional parenting," as both parent and child learn more about themselves while connecting with the other. The practice of body-mind connection—intentionally bringing the mind to the activity of the body—offers a simple yet profound tool for parents to enter into child-raising with openness and willingness to learn more about themselves in the process. When we move in the direction of being present via body-mind connection, we have the potential to be more connected to our essence, our wholeness. When parents approach events of life with this aim, children can feel supported by their family, while also having the freedom to discover their own individuality (McClafferty, Culbert, & Rosen, 2016).

We all need support to develop the skills and understanding to help us find the right guidance at the right time. Advice from friends, experts, or literature is useful only when applicable to our specific situations. We have the potential to develop our own inner compass, which supports us in making these choices. With our own inner compass, we can stop, regroup, and find the right guidance even when we are confronted with challenges.

The practice of Breema offers support for intentional parenting by providing practical tools for being present in everyday activities and interactions. We can practice connection to the body by staying with the process of inhalation and exhalation for a few breaths; or by bringing the mind to the movement of the body when doing simple activities like putting on socks, brushing teeth, or walking up stairs. Breema is a simple, natural form of touch and body movement supported by universal principles. Breema is a uniquely practical, experiential approach to understanding and self-development that has been refined and practiced for centuries. Over the last four decades it has been made accessible to the modern world by the Breema Center in Oakland, California.

Breema consists of three parts: self-care exercises (Self-Breema), partner exercises (Breema bodywork), and the Nine Principles of Harmony. These provide direct, accessible tools for self-care, registering direct experience in the moment, and unifying body, mind, and feelings. Practicing Breema offers the potential to support physical and psychological flexibility, mental clarity, and emotional balance. Breema can directly support us by encouraging connection to the body in the midst of everyday life.

The aim of Breema is to bring us to a tangible experience of presence that becomes our foundation for a new dimension of health, consciousness, and self-understanding (Schreiber, 2007). Breema provides a unique

approach to experiencing body-mind connection. It offers a profound understanding of the underlying unity of all life, expressed in a dynamic and practical philosophy, the key to which is found in the Nine Principles of Harmony. The practice of Self-Breema exercises and Breema bodywork is a living expression of that philosophy through the vehicle of the body. By using the Nine Principles in daily life, we have the opportunity to bring this teaching into each moment, for greater clarity and simplicity.

Here we will highlight examples of the Nine Principles as applied to daily life, including No Judgment, Firmness and Gentleness, and No Hurry/No Pause. These principles support us to see that we are constantly judging, we are usually either moving from firmness or gentleness (but not both), and we are always hurrying or pausing. By working with the Nine Principles, and by utilizing the bodywork to have a direct experience, we have the potential to understand how to come back to balance. We can develop the capacity to see both sides, recognizing that in every moment, we have the potential to see our judgments, to be firm and simultaneously gentle, and to move with a natural, balanced rhythm. All of the principles point us in the direction of having an actual experience of being present, and fully participating in the moment.

No Judgment in Parenting

We have all been in the supermarket watching a parent try, unsuccessfully, to manage an out-of-control child. Though I am embarrassed to admit it, my first thought is usually how much better I would manage the same situation. Then I check in with myself. I think about my own five kids—there have been plenty of times I have been, from the outsider's perspective, in the exact same place. This is when I am grateful for the principle, offered by Breema, of *No Judgment*.

No Judgment starts with not judging myself. As I try to rein my children in, I see how easily I get frustrated. That's actually a good thing, because now I have a chance to see how my reactions always get the best of me. If I don't judge myself for this, I can save energy and have a clearer mind to decide which step to take next.

No Judgment means I can have acceptance for what I see of myself. My goal is to gain familiarity with myself and my programmed responses. The more I practice Breema and work with the tools to be present in daily life, the more I am able to see myself—in acceptance—as I manifest in each situation. No Judgment reminds me that the world already has too much suffering in it—I don't need to add in my self-criticism. Once I see this, then I can actually have well-wishing for myself and others in parenting—and in all aspects of life!

Over time, the flexibility that develops by working with the Nine Principles enables us to be receptive, in the moment, to individual and family needs. The emphasis on body-mind connection gives us, through direct experience, a tangible *taste* of having body, mind, and feelings united in the activities of daily life. The “extra” of our information overload slips, momentarily, into the back seat. By supporting us to return, in the moment, to breath and body, the practice of Breema offers the opportunity for self-care in the midst of the hectic day. This can provide an invaluable tool for modeling positive behaviors for children. The Nine Principles serve as a gentle reminder of how I wish to be, and the tools that can support me.

Firmness & Gentleness in Parenting

The other day I was walking with one of my children, who is adopted from a traumatic background. She suddenly burst into tears. She was upset about a perceived social rejection. My first instinct was to educate her on how her own behavior might have contributed to the situation—to make this a “teaching moment.” Luckily, before I spoke, I remembered the Breema principle of *Firmness and Gentleness*. I saw that I wished to be present and have acceptance for her—and for myself for not having the “perfect” answer on hand. I also saw that I could not find that acceptance by looking for it in my mind. She did not want to talk about the issue, but I invited her to try. I saw I could create a firm structure in which she could understand the value of exploring her feelings. I stayed with the activity of my body walking as if it were a Self-Breema, and as my mind became quiet, the less I felt the need to jump in with my ideas on the subject. I stayed with this experience of body-mind connection, remembering that in true firmness, gentleness is needed as well. She didn’t need my opinion on the situation, just my support. She began to speak, and moved from her identification as the victim, to looking at what she may have said or done that had contributed to the situation, to making a plan for a new event—one that would be uplifting for her. Witnessing this transformation was heartwarming for me. I saw that fully listening to her while being connected to my body, and not interjecting, supported her to move through the emotional distress.

Working with acceptance is essential to understanding, integrating, and transforming the effects of trauma (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Self-judgment increases tension, which drains vital energy. Acceptance supports us to see this, rather than remaining stuck. Whether parent or child has experienced trauma, body-mind connection is an invaluable tool that supports our ability to respond appropriately in a given situation (van der Kolk, 2015).

Whenever body, mind, and feelings are not working together—when we are operating from the mechanical mind and reactive feelings—we parent from this fragmented state. We are living in the past and future, and modeling this to our children. Body-mind connection, combined with acceptance, can support us to raise our level of consciousness. From this higher dimension, from this more balanced state, we have the choice to respond intentionally, rather than from reactive habits of the past.

No Hurry/No Pause in Childbirth

The benefit of having a framework to support body-mind connection can be powerful in the labor room as well. I was sitting with my patient in early labor. She was unable to find a comfortable position, and was growing increasingly apprehensive. As I spoke with her, I remembered the principle of *No Hurry/No Pause*. I learned that her previous birth had been very traumatic. She had had an epidural that was turned off, against her wishes, when it was time to push. Although she was not experiencing strong contractions at this time, she was so afraid of what lay ahead that she was re-creating her previous experience. I stayed with my breath, and stayed present to her concerns, with the principle of *No Hurry/No Pause*. We discussed that each labor has its own rhythm that cannot be externally controlled, but can be viewed as evolving at exactly the right speed for the baby to adjust itself and navigate down the birth canal. As we spoke, her breathing began to pace with mine. We continued to discuss and recognize her fears, while staying present to the current situation. I felt that staying present in myself and connected to my own body supported her to be with the natural movement of her breath. She could then enter the experience, and stay with the relaxed state of her body, rather than becoming tense with anticipation. This birth became a joyful celebration of being in the body, in which she found the inner resources needed to transform her own experience.

Conclusion

By working with body-mind connection and the wish to be present, the journey of parenting has the potential to become one of self-discovery. The more we can familiarize ourselves with our automatic reactions, the more opportunity we have to recognize them when they come. We start to see that we are all living in our past experiences and our future concerns. The aim of Breema bodywork, Self-Breema, and the Nine Principles of Harmony is to come to an experience of the present moment via body-mind connection. Breema can be explored by experiencing the bodywork with a

local practitioner or attending a class either with a private instructor around the world, or at the Breema Center in Oakland, California.

Once we gain familiarity with this experience, we see that when body and mind are connected, our preoccupation with the past and future quiets down. When we are able to have an experience of this moment, we experience ourselves, and our energy, in a whole new way. We have the opportunity to see that each event of daily life has the potential to drain energy or replenish it. And gradually, we have the potential to develop the tools to have a choice in the matter. As we gain the ability to understand more about ourselves, we become more able to respond, rather than react, to daily life. By moving from our wholeness, we have the potential to truly support others. We can then have more energy for our day, and can be nourished, rather than drained, by the events of daily life.

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