

MESSAGE

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Breema Movements Support Self-Care

by Steve Brodsky



Breema is a holistic system consisting of Breema bodywork, Self-Breema movements, and the Nine Principles of Harmony. All three aspects are a support for being present both in bodywork practice and in daily life.

My Introduction to Breema

I first became interested in bodywork in 1998 while living and teaching English in Thailand. Thai massage classes were being offered everywhere, and after receiving quite a few treatments, I decided to participate in a workshop.

The combination of yoga-like and massage movements really drew me in, and it didn't take long to fall in love with working with other people in this way. One thing I remember being taught in those first classes is that when someone has pain in their body, there are certain techniques to use in order to "fix" them.

Upon my return to the Pacific Northwest from my travels, I soon enrolled in massage school. I loved the idea of working with people one-on-one, and I remember that almost everything I learned in school was based on what to do to help others.

There was also some focus on how to take care of myself while being a massage therapist, but I was young and at the time did not see that as important to helping either my clients or myself.

I was finishing up massage school when I attended my first Breema workshop. I was drawn to the practice when I saw people working on the floor because it reminded me of Thai massage.

At first, I was unsure about something I heard in the workshop. The instructors kept reminding the students to include themselves in what they were doing. I related to this because I had been doing yoga and meditating for quite some time, but I was there not for myself, I was there to learn a new technique for my massage practice.

By the end of the weekend workshop, I was so nourished and energized that I knew there was something in the teaching as a whole, and especially in the emphasis placed on the experience of the practitioner, that was for me. However, beginning to build my massage practice, and a new baby in my life, meant I was very busy.

From Fatigue to Vitality

Over a year went by and I was already noticing myself becoming fatigued by practicing massage for hours at a time. I loved the work, but I was also wondering if and how it could be a long-term, sustainable practice for me, without it taking a toll physiologically and psychologically.

That was when I went to my second Breema workshop. There was a seed planted at that first workshop; even then I knew when the time was right I would be ready to give that seed some water, to see how it would grow.

During the second workshop, the most profound part for me was not the partner bodywork but the Self-Breema movement exercises we practiced. The direction given by the instructors while practicing both Breema bodywork and Self-Breema was to bring my mind to be with the activity of my body, and if it wandered, keep bringing it back, over and over.

Doing that was so simple, like a moving meditation, and yet so profound.

I knew this was the missing piece in my massage practice—I had forgotten to include myself! By focusing on what my clients needed I was leaving out what I needed.

Usually during sessions my energy just kept flowing outward, and I felt increasingly drained. How could I take care of others in any meaningful way if I was not taking care of myself? My being stressed out, uncomfortable, or in pain while doing a session, would ultimately not support either myself or my clients, no matter how much I thought the “technique” I used would be of benefit.

At that point, I knew I had to find a way to sustain or even increase my own well-being while doing bodywork, or risk being injured or getting burned out. I was ready to see what the effect of what I learned in Breema workshops might be during sessions even though I was not doing Breema bodywork as part of my massage practice.



Including My Body, Mind, and Feelings

How to not drain my energy, and take care of my body, keep my mind engaged, and keep feelings balanced while practicing massage? Practicing Breema and Self-Breema showed me the value of coming to a body-mind connection that's direct and tangible as a support for being more present and vital.

I began to see how that also applied in my massage work, and that gave me new directions to explore. The Self-Breema movement exercises I so much enjoyed learning and doing provided key answers to that question.

Because I could do Self-Breema anywhere at any time, I began to use it as a tool in my day-to-day practice. I started doing Self-Breema exercises before my clients arrived, and sometimes between clients. I noticed immediately how that helped sustain my energy throughout many sessions. I was no longer drained after a day of bodywork, in fact, I began to feel energized and more connected to my body and my work as a whole.

By working to be present in myself through Self-Breema, I can know if I am going in the right direction both for myself and for my clients. This helps me to be more available and practice self-care while also expanding what I can offer others.

One thing Breema and Self-Breema ask me to do is bring my mind to the activity of my body, and stay with that. If my mind wanders, I simply bring it back. When I do it, I notice that I actually lose less energy, because my mind and body do not have two different agendas, but are united in a single aim.

That saves energy and supports me to be more present and available in the moment to what is actually needed, not to settle for concepts about what I should do.

Stay Connected to Weight and Breath

An experience that really made it clear to me how important the support of Self-Breema was in my practice came while working with a client who had severe neck pain and tightness. As I was sitting at her head working on her neck, I noticed how tense my own shoulders were.

I remembered having done a Self-Breema exercise that included shrugging and then releasing my shoulders in a certain way a few times. I did those movements as best I could while sitting there, and noticed the tension in my shoulders begin to melt away.

Then I remembered that in many Self-Breema exercises I register three of my own breaths, and knew that the best way of continuing to support myself was to do just that.

As I sat and held her neck, I experienced taking three complete inhalations and exhalations to connect more deeply to myself, and registered the weight of my body sitting, supported by the stool. Now my mind was also engaged, connected to the activity of my body, just as if I were doing a Self-Breema. Instead of being concerned about the result or whether my client would like or dislike what I did, my feelings were calm and balanced.

With my own shoulders, arms and hands more relaxed, and simply staying connected to my weight and breath, I brought my attention to my fingers under her neck and noticed her tension releasing.

Over time, I verified that the inner atmosphere of comfort, calmness, and presence I cultivated in my own body included my clients, and invited them to let go of what they no longer needed and move toward being more present as well.

Through studying Breema, I also learned that no matter what the condition of the client's body is, I don't need to try and "fix" it. And I read many times in books about Breema, "Don't fight disease, support vitality."

Taking this perspective, I have a wish to support my clients by nurturing what is vital and whole within them, not by seeing them as a fragmented set of ailments. I wish to see a client as an essentially healthy person who is exactly the way they need to be at this moment, not as a set of problems that need to be addressed. And that is the way I wish to see myself.

Through doing and teaching a lot of Self-Breema, it's been clear that my body has limitations and restrictions, and when doing an exercise, both sides of my body do not feel or function the same way. But by working with the Breema principles (most often, Body Comfortable and No Judgment), I can move toward acceptance of however my body is, and modify my posture and movements as needed.

Gradually and with No Force, this has resulted in increasing my flexibility and experiencing less pain. I now use this approach in the therapeutic setting as well, so that I can work comfortably with clients over the course of a day with less strain and tension.

Recently I worked with a client who had many physical limitations. When critical thoughts about his body started, I remembered my own body's constraints when doing Self-Breema, so I could drop my judgment and my direction was clear: include myself, with acceptance.

As I was rocking my body and moving my hands along his legs, that reminded me of doing Self-Breema exercises where I rock and move my hands along my own legs. Then as I brushed along his legs, I did that with my whole body, and my mind was with that, as if I were doing Self-Breema. I knew my body was breathing and had weight as I stayed with my posture and movements, using the principle of Single Moment/Single Activity as a support.

I wasn't doing the massage with just hands, arms, or any "part" of me; my whole body, mind and feelings were vibrantly alive and I was present with Full Participation.

Supporting Myself So I Can Support Others

Breema, Self-Breema and the Nine Principles of Harmony continue to be my greatest support in my life and my bodywork practices. When I am comfortable, I am more available to whatever I am doing, whether by myself or with my clients.

When I can see myself with No Judgment, I can see my clients through that same lens. When I don't need to "fix" someone, I can do massage movements with No Force. When I take care of myself and know what I need moment after moment, I have a possibility to support others from a place of Mutual Support.

As I have continued to work with this holistic system over the last couple of decades, I have recognized that I can attribute my longevity in the massage and bodywork field to the essential support it provides.

In particular I see how Self-Breema, as a set of down-to-earth, simple yet sometimes challenging movements, has been one of my greatest tools for self-care, enhancing and extending the effectiveness and enjoyment of my practice.

About the Author



Steve Brodsky, LMT, a Certified Breema Instructor living in Eugene, OR, teaches a weekly Self-Breema class on Zoom. For the past 20 years, he has practiced and taught Breema and Self-Breema, massage, yoga and nutritional wellness. Visit www.breema.com for information about upcoming classes and Intensives.