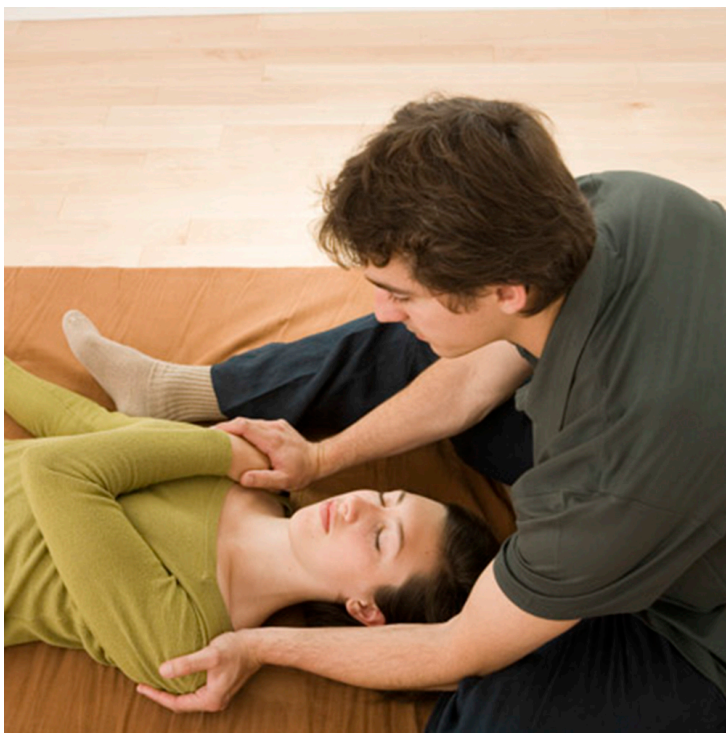


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Breema Principles Nourish Practitioners

by David Pratt



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

My Journey to Breema

The first forms of bodywork I ever learned were modalities in which I simply let my hands rest on the recipient and allowed balance and harmony to emerge. My teachers of these approaches emphasized making physical contact with the client and just being present.

As a meditator since childhood, this barebones “being with” approach resonated, I felt refreshed and enlivened by giving, and recipients were relaxed and thankful. Enthused by these experiences, my interest in bodywork grew to include approaches with more physicality and specific intentions, like Shiatsu and neuromuscular therapies.

Before I knew it, I was enrolled in massage school with a strong wish to be in service to others. Throughout this period, I eagerly absorbed everything I could read about massage and bodywork, and attended workshop after workshop.

However, when I began practicing massage, I quickly saw that although I was still extremely enthusiastic about the work, something was missing. I was constantly striving to find that former simplicity of just being present with clients in my early days of bodywork.

I started to develop chronic pain in my thoracic spine, aching hands, and intense, day-long headaches that were obviously tied to the physical demands of the work. Always one to practice self-care, I took this all in stride for quite a while. I became very adept at giving myself treatments and made time in my schedule for getting regular massages.

Still, I felt that a more sustainable way had to be possible.

Then, in the fall of 2001, I attended my first Breema Intensive. Called “The Art of Being Present.” I read about it beforehand, and was immediately intrigued by one of the system’s main tenets: Practitioners could be nourished as they gave treatments, that they could receive as they gave. Could this be true? I sincerely hoped so, but until I spent some time working with what was presented, I did not know for myself.

Now I do.

The effect of those classes created a sort of a quiet revolution in my work with clients.

First, the intensive was deeply replenishing. Beyond learning some of the bodywork—which I did indeed experience as a simultaneous giving and receiving—I went home having learned multiple Self-Breema exercises. I can’t over-state the value of this.

The Nine Principles of Harmony

Self-Breema gave me a tool to practice working with the Nine Principles of Harmony in a way that allowed that time to be completely for myself. This was foundational in bringing what I had learned into my work with clients, and it was the missing element that had begun to make my massage practice less satisfying and even challenging.

I had needed to include myself, and Breema offered a very clear and practical direction for doing that.

After my introduction to this holistic system, I took it upon myself to use one of the Nine Principles of Harmony as a support for being present in my practice and in daily life over the following nine weeks, focusing on one principle a week.

The Nine Principles are:

1. Body Comfortable
2. No Extra
3. Firmness and Gentleness

4. Full Participation
5. Mutual Support
6. No Judgment
7. Single Moment/Single Activity
8. No Hurry/No Pause
9. No Force

The first week, I chose Body Comfortable, which is a cornerstone principle. This was perfect, as I happened to have a lot of clients that week.

One day included a house call with six hours of treatments and no significant breaks. At the beginning of that particularly busy day, I got up early to be nourished by doing Self-Breema. As I sat on a firmly padded rug in my treatment room, I let my body rock side-to-side, moving my hands down the length of my legs and leaning some weight in at each location.

As I continued, there was a growing ease in this natural movement, my mind became quiet, and there was a sense of calm fulfillment. Incrementally, I allowed my body to adjust to the most comfortable way to move. When I finished, it was almost like I had just gotten up from receiving a treatment.

Spending time this way helped bring the principle of Body Comfortable into my workday.

When I sat down at the table for my first client, I remembered that I could include myself and took a moment to register one inhalation and one exhalation before making contact. Throughout the session, I periodically recognized when I had forgotten body-mind connection. At those times, I continued to do the particular technique or movement I was doing, but now as if it was a Self-Breema exercise.

For example, I came to the activity of my body leaning back as I held my client's arm, and experienced the delicious aliveness of allowing my body to move in the direction of what was most comfortable for me. In perfect balance, this helped cue me in to what was comfortable for my recipient. By the end of that first treatment, I saw that instead of being a bit drained, I was filled up with energy and ready to continue.

The next week, I chose No Force. I noticed that when working to release trigger points and other restricted soft tissues, remembering No Force brought me first to the experience of my own body.

Once I was working on a client's trapezius and suddenly saw how much the concept of separation was there—the idea of me working to get rid of tension. I experienced tension in my own shoulders, and as I registered my whole body moving with No Force as a guideline, most of that tension simply dropped away. As this happened, I could more easily sense my client's soft tissue releasing, with less physical force needed from me. I experienced being in a dance-like relationship, rather than a "me fixing him" role.

On the first day of practicing the principle of No Hurry/No Pause, I found myself standing outside the treatment room, waiting for my client to be ready. I say, "found myself," but more succinctly, all at once I saw that I'd been lost in thoughts.

That's when I came to the weight of my body and breath and there was a shift to being available.

When my client indicated that she was ready, I experienced walking toward the door and opening it with Full Participation. It was as if I was even benefiting from these seemingly mundane activities, by being present. During our session, I was reminded to come home to my body again when thoughts came to the foreground.

As my thumbs were gliding through my client's forearm extensors, the principle of Single Moment/Single Activity was spontaneously alive. It was as if I had all of the time in the world, and only this one activity to do.

I was nourished by that exchange, and experienced the Mutual Support in it. It was during this week that I really began to get what I had heard at the Breema Intensive: that the principles were hologenic, each one containing all the others. Sometimes I would experience one principle after another, and at other times, I would recognize their interconnectedness.

This was the case the following week. Talking with a client after her treatment, I saw that my mind had checked out, as if a part of me thought that since the treatment was done, I didn't really need to be present. That came as a bit of a shock, and brought me to experience my feet on the floor.

No Judgment was needed, and that wasn't merely theoretical. I experienced an atmosphere of No Judgment as I now listened to her with Full Participation. Just as I had experienced in Breema classes, my impression was that I was both giving and receiving in the midst of everyday conversation as we wrapped up and said our goodbyes. As she left, I had genuine gratitude, because I saw that she had provided me with a precious opportunity to be in service to her while also helping me to remain connected to myself.

After that week, I increasingly noticed that although I had a "theme principle," I often remembered a variety of them in each day.

One afternoon, I was doing a Breema bodywork treatment with a client. Both her legs were comfortably draped over my upright leg. My left hand was resting on her abdomen with Firmness and Gentleness, and my right hand was holding her toes in the same way.

Staying with Firmness and Gentleness gave my mind an ongoing focus as I allowed my body to be comfortable throughout this particular sequence of rocking movements, leans, brushes and holds.

I could feel my client settling in, her body became very relaxed, and her breathing deepened. I quietly finished and left the room so she could have time to digest.

Very slowly she opened the door, and without speaking, sat down and almost immediately began crying. In a short time, what sounded sorrowful began to sound like tears of relief. I experienced my body standing, just taking in the room and simply wishing to allow her to go through her experience.

After a few minutes, she took a breath and told me that during the treatment she had experienced a tremendous amount of grief about her mother's death, which she had never expressed before. When that had passed, she came to a deep sense of peace, and when she moved to stand up, it was like she had landed in her body for the first time.

Sitting in the chair, she said that for the first time in six months she also had no sciatic pain. Through further contacts with her, I knew that it did not return.

I don't include these details to give the impression that Breema can fix any particular ailment. However, by practicing the Nine Principles during sessions I see the atmosphere they foster has the potential to create a profound level of acceptance in which healing and transformation are possible.

As the practitioner brings him- or herself to balance and their vitality is nurtured, the recipient is also supported to come to a more balanced state in which they are deeply nourished.

When my client finished speaking, we were both silent for a minute, and then I almost said something, but at the last second I remembered my principle of the week, Firmness and Gentleness. As I stood there, I became present and knew I was standing. I had clarity enough to see that what I had almost said was actually not necessary.

It was extra, and No Extra was needed.

When I did speak, I knew what the best support was to give. I thanked her for her openness and for confiding in me, and we hugged and said goodbye until next time.

Harmony Begins with Myself

As I finish writing, I see that as a massage therapist, I have a valuable opportunity to support others. By using the Nine Principles, I can simultaneously benefit from that exchange in a way that is natural, meaningful, and sometimes even transformational.

Not only have the principles been an enormous support for teaching me how to be present while doing all types of massage and bodywork, they have given me tools that let that work be restorative and sustainable.

Also, I'm grateful to have learned what was missing early on in my massage career—me!

I now know that I can both be nourished by doing my job and find harmony in how I do it as well, and it all begins with myself.

About the Author



David Pratt, LMT, is a certified Breema Instructor and co-founder of True Nature Holistic Retreats in Ohio, where he and his wife, Alana, offer retreats including massage, bodywork, yoga, meditation, and Self-Breema classes. Visit www.breema.com for information about upcoming classes and Intensives.