

## Breema

By Dave Pratt, LMT

"Braema?"

"Breema."

"Broomer?"

"No, it's b-r-e-e-m-a."

"Oh. What is it?"

I'm not surprised when people look puzzled at the mention of Breema Bodywork and Self-Bodywork. Perhaps maybe you've never heard about it, either. When I discovered Breema, I was as much intrigued by what it wasn't as by what it was. Let me explain.

About six years ago, while I was still in massage school, I was studying physiology in the lounge when I decided to take a well-deserved break. Hoping for some lighter reading than on the function of the kidneys, I picked up a copy of *Massage and Bodywork Magazine*.<sup>1</sup> Boy, was I relieved!



The body loves to do Breema, because it stays comfortable. Breema doesn't ask the body to do anything that is not natural for it. Inside, I saw pictures of people gracefully participating in what

looked like a playful dance. One fully clothed woman lay face-up on a Persian rug, hips flexed and knees draped over the left thigh of her half-kneeling female partner. The second woman was leaning slightly forward with one palm nestled in the soft area just below the other woman's right collarbone. Her other hand was scooped under the left shoulder, blending with the natural curve of the scapula. The position appeared effortless, and there was such balance between the two of them.

These pictures conveyed a sense of mutual support and ease that interested me. Both women looked content, as if they were exactly where they needed to be. Perhaps some of these details come to me in hindsight, but I was definitely aware that there was something very different to this technique. The photographs brought to mind other floor-based modalities with one exception: the visible tension (like tight arms pushing a client toward a deep stretch) that usually accompanies such techniques. I had been studying martial arts for years, so the idea of moving with the whole body to minimize strain and force resonated with me. In my massage studies, I would see the value of using minimal force - especially with the number of massage therapists that burn out physically and mentally after only a few years. So many therapists work too hard without properly caring for their own bodies.

As I read the article, I actually felt more relaxed. In school, I had absorbed enormous amounts of information about anatomy and physiology, and countless techniques for achieving results, as varied as reflexive effects on each internal organ, and methods to resolve different types of headaches. Each has a specific rate and prescribed duration to reach a particular end. While these are all useful, Breema was liberating.

The author, Dr. Jon Schreiber, director of the Breema Health and Wellness Center, explained that the foremost concern of the Breema practitioner is his or her own comfort. Wait - did I read that right? Isn't bodywork about giving your best to the client, eliminating the pain, and calming him or her down? Aren't we supposed to be making people better? I read on.

Breema, the article said, "uses the natural mechanics, rhythm, and relaxed weight of the practitioner's body to create a precise and dynamic balance that is profoundly comfortable, enjoyable, and beneficial for both recipient and practitioner." It sounded wonderful. He further described treatment sequences that weren't intended to be any particular rate or depth, but only called for what was most natural and comfortable for the practitioner. He explained how each sequence was "composed of a harmonious choreography of movements: gentle, yet penetrating stretches; gradual leaning; rhythmic brushing and percussive tapping."

"Body Comfortable," the first of nine guiding principles, seemed to be key to Breema being called "The Art of Being Present." When a practitioner continually returned to his or her own body's comfort and the registration of his or her own weight and breathing, several things happened:

1. Tension was released and the practitioner's energy was renewed. (Imagine the difference between being with someone who is tense and someone who is relaxed. Now imagine receiving bodywork from each person. Makes sense, huh?)
2. "By focusing on the comfort of your own body, you are actually giving the recipient exactly what her [or his] body needs too." Since each body supported the other, all movements would be balanced between the weight and comfortable limits of each one. This is what I was sensing in the photographs.
3. Returning to the body in the present moment kept a person from getting tangled in his or her thoughts, judgment about how the treatment was going, or need to correct something that was supposedly wrong with the recipient. This, in turn, created an atmosphere that could increase vitality for each person by accepting both as they were, rather than treating people like lists of symptoms or problems. It all looked good on paper, but what about experiencing it firsthand?

Well, four years after I read that article, I got my first taste of Breema at a two-day workshop. I was happy to find that giving and receiving bodywork could be equally nourishing. Lying comfortably on a padded floor, I discovered what fun Breema was. At one point, I recall thinking, "I feel like water."

There was such fluidity to the treatment that it didn't feel like anything was being "done" to me, but that I was discovering I had a body for the first time! Afterward, I felt peacefully light and more fully aware of my body's movements. Leaning back as I held a friend's arms, I received a stretch through my whole body. Then, leaning in with my palms on his shoulders, I was perfectly supported by his body. The greatest part was that we both enjoyed and benefited from each treatment.

Since that introduction, I have happily found that it is simple to use the principles of Breema with massage and other types of bodywork, and - really - in any activity in life.

Breema's nine principles of harmony are:

1. Body Comfortable
2. Single Moment/Single Activity
3. Full Participation

4. No Hurry/No Pause
5. No Extra
6. Firmness and Gentleness
7. No Judgment
8. Mutual Support; and
9. No Force

*Reference*

1. Schreiber, Jon. "Breema bodywork: an ancient tradition for modern times." *Massage and Bodywork Magazine*. Feb/March, 1999. 12-19.



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