

# Have We Met? Savasana and the Essential Self

By Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT

"You did a good job with that patient", my Yoga Therapy supervisor told me recently. "But I want you to...bring more of your SELF into the work." I thought, **I've heard these words before.**

I sat in silence for a moment, remembering the days on stage when I was transitioning from the ensemble as a dancer and singer in the chorus to playing leading roles. I had been so accustomed to blending in, striving in every way to be precise and exacting. Directors in show after show would find ways to coax out of me, I suppose, **my essential self** when I played those roles. And now again, in a different field of work, my supervisor was telling me to **Be Your SELF.**

So here I was, completing a training at Beth Israel Medical Center's Department of Integrative Medicine, not on stage playing a role, but teaching therapeutic yoga to surgical patients. It was not lost on me that I was getting the same feedback I used to receive in theatre. Am I missing something? What about this is different?

The difference now is through my practice of yoga, I have become more aware of my nerves, my desire to make the experience "perfect". So with the next patient, I decided to let my nerves stay in the room (how could I not?), but I let them **take a backseat.**

The patient was resistant, so I just made conversation. I used my SELF to make the connection, and it turns out, that connection was what he needed more than anything. Over time he warmed up and wanted to know more about what I was there to do. And soon enough, we were practicing yoga together, using physical movements and breath work; he from his hospital bed after back surgery. And me standing at the foot of the bed demonstrating and talking him through it.

At the end of the session, I asked him, "How's your pain?"

"It's much better," he admitted thoughtfully.

"Nausea?" I asked.

"Nope," he replied.

"What about anxiety?"

He smiled with a twinkle in his eye. "It's a thing of the past."

### Finding Your Essential Self: Savasana (shah VAH sah nah)

- Lie on the floor on your mat or on a bed, on your back
- Make sure to move blankets, pillows, or props aside so nothing is touching your arms, legs, hands, or feet
- Rest your arms by your sides, palms facing up
- Relax in your hip sockets so your legs splay open
- Close your eyes
- Pay attention to each inhale, and each exhale
- When your mind wanders, just bring it back to the inhale and exhale
- Hold this pose for 5 minutes or longer, and see what happens!

### The Broader Concept

I tell this story not just to shed light on the subtle and powerful benefits of yoga. But just as much to show how **knowing what separates the essential you from the chatter that wants perfection can change lives, can change your life, moment by moment.**

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