

I am the Open Hand

Love and Loss as an Integral Practice

By Rachael Feigenbaum, ITP SF Co-leader

A few months ago I crafted an affirmation, “I am the open hand.” I came to this in dealing with feelings of being overwhelmed and alone as a single mom. I had a desire to allow things to unfold and accept them as they are in reality, rather than how I thought they “should” be. I hadn’t known, at the time, how much this affirmation would help me in other situations as well.

As a veterinarian, I’ve cared for countless animals in the later stages of illness or aging, but I recently experienced this process firsthand with my own beloved 18-year-old dog, Millie. She taught me profound lessons by her example on how to be in one’s body and live in the moment without anticipating the future’s uncertainties. Petting her soft little face, looking into her soulful eyes, and seeing her pure joy in taking in the smells and sensations of being at the beach, were some of the best ways I knew of “dropping in” to my hara and getting grounded and centered.



Near the end of July, Millie suddenly became ill and within a few weeks she was no longer able to get up the stairs and was barely eating. As a vet I thought that I “should” have been able to nurse her back to health, and so I felt a sense of failing her when it became clear that she wasn’t going to recover. I shared my feelings with my ITP community and used the Kata and meditation practice to feel deeply into my love and appreciation for this precious little furry being who so generously shared her life and love with me.

I finally had to make the decision to euthanize Millie, holding her in my arms and celebrating her life, surrounded by the people who loved her most. As I watched Millie make the passage from life to death, I remembered my affirmation, “I am the open hand,” and allowed myself to let go of one of the purest loves that I have known.

Through this process of grieving and letting go, I experienced the truth that feeling deeply into the transience and fragility of life can help to unlock our fullest human potential. Positive transformation necessitates being in the flow of change. Like Millie, we are all here for a brief amount of time, and have the opportunity to fully experience the pleasures and pains of the body, and the love and connection we can find with ourselves, loved ones (including those of other species,) and our communities. Living into this truth brought me more into presence, and offered me a deep appreciation for the vast love that resides within me, and the extraordinary mystery of which we are all a part.