

In Praise of the Kata

by Tim Cleary

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The Kata is a foundational practice, perhaps **the** foundational practice, in ITP. Created by George Leonard, it is part of the ITP program inspired by the ideas about integral practice outlined in Michael Murphy's *The Future of the Body* and Michael and George's combined experiences at Esalen Institute. After years of seeing many people have apparent transformations that disappeared after they returned home, they realized that two elements were missing: a long-term practice and a supportive community. Integral Transformative Practice was born! At its core, the ITP Kata is a beautiful blend of Eastern and Western practices.



George was the right man at the right time to create this sublime practice. Informed by years of writing and editing, he had a keen appreciation for clarity and brevity. The Kata was carefully crafted to be completed in 40-45 minutes, thus creating a manageable daily practice for busy people with busy lives.

In the years that led up to his development of the Kata, he had taken up the demanding art of Aikido, which directly influenced much of the content and spirit of the practice, including the name Kata, which means “form” in Japanese. Also, in the mid-to-late 1980's, George had produced a series of yearly fitness issues for *Esquire Magazine*. Highly acclaimed, these special issues were filled with articles and tips from world-class athletes and trainers well versed in cutting edge training techniques. This series culminated in the final issue that focused on Mastery. A few years later, the book *Mastery* was published. A more perfect background could hardly be imagined to meet the challenge of creating such a coherent practice for the modern age.

The Kata begins with GRACE, Annie Leonard's beautiful acronym for Ground, Relax, Aware, Center and Energize. A brief standing meditation, it allows us to become fully present, centered and balanced, leaving us poised to reap the benefits of what's to come.

This is followed by the Water Series. Drawn from Aikido movements, it allows us to warm the muscles, lubricate the joints and stimulate our energies.

Next comes Articulation. Beginning with the shoulders, we mindfully rotate all of our joints, striving for a full range of motion.

The Two-Step follows. Another Aikido movement, this allows us to become aware of our center moving through space. It is not taught in *The Life We are Given* or *The Tao of Practice* because George deemed it too difficult to learn without the presence of a qualified teacher.

We now come to the Floor Series, in which we progressively stretch the major muscle groups. Ending in a mini-Yoga series which includes the Sun Salutation and a Spinal Twist, the body is now prepared for deep relaxation. Progressive Relaxation allows us to move through the body alternately tightening and relaxing the muscles. This is followed by a second, internal pass through the body in which we mentally release any residual tension.

Now we come to the heart of the matter - transformation! The Kata up to this point has prepared us to enter a deeper, more relaxed state of being, just right for making strong mental and emotional impressions on our inner body and mind. This is accomplished by bringing to mind affirmations that we have carefully crafted to allow us to achieve our desired transformed state. We support the affirmations with Transformative Imagery, allowing ourselves to envision our transformed selves in whatever way best serves us - by seeing, hearing, feeling – using all of our senses.

We end the Kata with Meditation, spending at least 10 minutes in mindful sitting. An ancient practice that offers an opportunity to observe our thoughts, feelings, impulses and sensations, it also contains an important ITP concept called focused-surrender. After focusing on our transformed state we surrender into meditation, letting go of our own imagery to release it into the universe. This allows an inflow of universal or divine energy to return to us, delivering our desired intentions and sometimes, through grace, much more.

Although ITP was designed as a group endeavor, the beauty of the Kata is that it can be practiced on one's own or with a friend to great benefit. *The Tao of Practice* DVD is a good resource for learning the Kata, if there is no easy access to an ITP group. Another option is to attend an ITP workshop or to participate in the Mastery program, a nine-month immersion into the core practices of ITP with a wonderful community of dedicated practitioners and teachers. In whatever way you learn, as George Leonard would say, "Enjoy your practice!"

[Click here](#) to enjoy listening to *The Kata Song*, written by Tim Cleary, and performed by Tim and Rich Sigberman, Mastery and ITP San Rafael Member.