

## Spotlight: Cesar Hernandez

ITP Palo Alto Co-leader and Mastery member

*How did you become involved in ITP?* I picked up a flyer for an open session at my church, Companions on the Journey. I then met Michael Choy, the leader of ITP Palo Alto, and he explained what the group was about in a kind and patient manner that encouraged me to explore this possibility. Interestingly enough, our Spiritual Director at Companions on the Journey, Fr. Sean O'Laoire, encouraged the original formation of ITP Palo Alto.

*What do you appreciate about the practice?* What I appreciate most about the practice is the community. I get the privilege to practice with seekers like me. I get to practice with people who inspire me with their courage, love, and wisdom. Our ITP Palo Alto community has been essential in my process of transformation. I can't express how vitally important a loving community is to my life and my desire to become skillful in interfacing with life. Our community has created a space where I have been supported and encouraged to inquire into my life, seek understanding, and then present my findings to our group. It is a rich, scary, rewarding community of discovery and learning. I am so grateful to continue to participate in our group despite my recent move to Oregon.



*What keeps you practicing ITP?* I continue to practice because I enjoy being with my ITP Palo Alto community and because I desire to live a loving life.

*How did/do you benefit from participating in Mastery?* I experienced more of myself in a more intense way while participating in Mastery. This allowed for more inquiry and understanding. I also witnessed highly skillful and caring leadership which allowed me to have courage to be vulnerable during my Mastery experience.

*What drew you to the Mastery program? What is one of the things that you like most about the program?* What drew me to the Mastery program was my desire to understand ITP theory and practices better. One of the things I like most about the program is the integration of LET exercises. Leonard Energy Training allowed me to bring awareness to my experience, inquire about it, and then pursue understanding of it. When something is experienced in my body and I am able to perceive it, then it becomes relevant to my life and that's when I get curious and desire to understand it.

*Can you share a story about how something you've learned through ITP made a difference in your life and/or led you to take some major steps in your life?* I moved to Florence, Oregon three weeks ago. I drove a 16 foot Penske rental truck for about 12 hours. I experienced anxiety as I drove across

bridges, bodies of water, and mountains I had never seen before. I felt fear in my body and mind. I feared that I would drive the truck off the road, off of a bridge and kill myself and my 13 year-old son who was riding with me. I pulled out my mental ITP tool bag. I reached for Self-Compassion first. It didn't work. I pulled out Self-Acceptance. It made it worse. Then I spontaneously pulled out the G from GRACE, which as you know, stands for ground. I placed my fear, thinking, physical sensations and energies, sights, and sounds into my feet, then into the rental truck itself and then imagined that all of that stimuli was packing the rental truck into the road, more and more until it felt secure in the ground. At some point I began to repeat that all of nature was supporting me in packing the truck into the road and that a magnet from the earth's core was pulling the rental truck into the ground. This worked! My fear decreased in intensity, although it never left me. This tool of grounding allowed me to complete the drive to Oregon.

*What do you do when you meet resistance with your practice?* I do some unconscious and conscious coping behaviors, such as ignoring the fact that I'm not doing my practice so I don't feel guilty about it. I'll find activities that I will use to rationalize the not doing of my practice such as anything that completes the sentence, "\_\_\_\_\_ is more important than my practice." At some point I face what I have been avoiding, which for me, is not the practice itself, but an emotion. This results in understanding myself and that understanding creates a feeling of compassion and of unity, of not being at odds with myself.

*Tell us about one of your most powerful affirmations.* "I live consciously" is one of my most powerful affirmations. It is the first pillar of self-esteem from Nathaniel Branden's book, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. I like it because it is simple and powerful. It expresses my desire to be a fully conscious human being.

*Is there anything you'd like to say to the ITP community?* ITP has been a loving community that supports my desire to be fully conscious by accepting me as I am, encouraging me, mentoring me, and providing me with opportunities to share my discoveries. I want to give a heartfelt thank you to all of ITP and a special thank you to my ITP PA community.

*What has being a co-leader of ITP PA taught you about yourself?* That looking within, while scary, and requiring courage, is an act of love.