

GRAVITY by Debbie Horton

Through practicing yoga I realise that I have spent most of my adult life bracing myself against gravity, the muscles in my shoulders and hips in particular, grimly gripping and pushing against this unseen and ever present force. All that energy invested in contracting my muscles rather pointlessly and against what? Fear of the world and a lack of trust in life? It seems a rather sad and lonely response, and not one I need to keep repeating. School physics taught me that gravity was the weakest of the four natural forces, that it describes the pull of one object on another, there was Galileo, Newton, and then Einstein with his theory that it isn't a force at all but a movement resulting from a curvature in spacetime. Beyond understanding that it was gravity that gave me a sense of weight, I didn't have any idea how it affected me, or humans, on a more subtle level. I'm learning more about that through the experience of yoga.

This unfolding response to gravity is turning out to be quite an adventure. Already it has given me a more intimate connection to the Earth and my environment, and an enhanced sense of security. Earth is home, not just in my head, as an idea, but in my body, as a reality. I/we are always orienting to it, as gravity has a direction, it pulls us towards the Earth. My body is a response to the environment; it's created as a part of it. I don't just live on the Earth, I'm shaped by it, and I can't live without those same shaping forces. In Space, where gravity is almost zero, our muscles shrink, our bones lose density, we don't work as we are designed to and we have to come back down to Earth at some point to regain our health. When my body holds just enough tension to be able to move, to be dynamic, but not wasteful of energy, to resist gravity so that it strengthens and enlivens rather than trying to hold it at bay, then I sense an opening up, an expansion, and a moving outwards. This happens physically if I am standing or upright, the upper body gently extends and lifts like a plant growing towards the sun. It is also a feeling, which I would describe as love, a moving towards from the heart, not towards anything in particular, but there and dynamic, in quite an impersonal way.

Letting go of as much tension as I can, whilst standing, and dropping it towards the Earth feels like something that can't just be done once, I have to keep doing it. I have an image of lava slowly slipping down the sides of a volcano. As weight is dropped to the Earth the lower parts of my body feel rooted into the ground, strong, alive and reliable, and my upper body feels light, free, my energy no longer bound into my muscles, my attitude softer, my mind freer and less contracted. I still find this puzzling. What happens at that point in the lumbar curve where downward thrust to the earth meets upward thrust towards the sky. Does it happen between the vertebrae? How?

If I lie on the ground, giving the whole of my body to the Earth, then I can find a place where I feel almost weightless, completely relaxed and without stress anywhere in my body. It feels like an old place to be, I feel like a human creature. It's a better place to begin exploring the world from, as it is effortless. Just the right amount of tension to counter gravity arises from the effortlessness as I

move and become more dynamic. When I am aware of unnecessary tension creeping back I can gently release it, and I am aware of the habitual ideas that a tense mind can go back to and I can come back to my body and abandon those thoughts.

Gravity makes my body what it is, that has become clearer on a feeling level. It supports it to be strong, stable and powerful, secure in itself and related to this Earth. My body isn't something that is cocooned from the environment, a separate thing, with its own rationale and way of functioning, it comes from it, evolves with it and continues to blend with it through gravity and breathing.

'The gravity experience is considerable, sobering and enlightening' John Stirk.