

# Embedded in Gravity

## Musing about the Human Gravity Project



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**ABSTRACT** *All humans are embedded in a gravity project. It is a project where we learn to rest down into the support of the ground while also reaching upward into spaciousness so that we may orient to, and move through, our environment. Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® faculty member, Pierpaola Volpones, describes the gravity journey, some of the common experiences gravity brings to each of us as human beings.*

*There are two young fishes swimming in the ocean. An old fish comes by and says, "Mmmm . . . today the water is fresh," and moves away. The two young fishes look at each other and say, "Water? What is it?"*

Gravity for us is like water for fish; we are embedded in gravity. Gravity is a key part of our environment, like water is a key part of the fish's environment. It is the foundation element of our existence on Earth. The physics of gravity is easy



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– masses attract each other. The Earth's massive mass attracts us, and our infinitesimal mass also pulls on the Earth. Gravity not only impacts our physical development but also how we function in our daily lives.

Gravity is ever-present. It does not change – luckily. It is the force that gives us the direction of down and up. For us humans, it keeps us *with our feet on the ground*. To perceive it takes some practice, incidents, and accidents. We perceive the effect of gravity when we fall down or while carrying heavy weights, for example. When we lose our balance, we feel gravity. Sometimes, gravity can hurt.

When we harness the force of gravity, that is when we feel organized and balanced in gravity, we feel at ease. We gain effortless upward length where our heads can reach towards the sky. To fall down, to get back up, and to reach skyward – this is the human gravity project.

In common language, gravity can be synonymous with seriousness, severity, and graveness. In this perspective, gravity could be unpleasant. But, think about the word: gravity comes from the Latin word *gravitas*, meaning weight. For me, it contains the word “gravid” as well, meaning heavy, pregnant, full or teeming, and meaningful. It could give birth; to what? To lightness.

## Unveiling Gravity

The “skyhook” that Ida Rolf, PhD (1896-1979) writes about in her book represents the sense of lightness contained within the phenomenon of gravity (1977). The more we reach toward alignment with our bodies balancing in gravity, and connecting with the ground, the more we experience lightness. When we are light, we are lifted upward; we elevate, and we are erect. We might move toward evolving, as Dr. Rolf pointed out. Being erect is also a direction for our evolution as human beings.

Gravity and balance are factors of the same equation. The more we are balanced in our physical structure, the more gravity becomes a structural organizing factor. The pressure of gravity stimulates our bone tissues to solidify our osseous spaces with calcium. Think about the astronauts who develop osteoporosis and weakness of the muscles during space missions (For more information, see *Fascia Insights* on page 6). It seems



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that even vision is affected during space missions, probably because of a different blood distribution within the body. In an environment with a different intensity of gravity, our body would be very different from what we experience.

## Gravity and Physical Development from Infancy

After we leave the fluid environment of the womb, we meet two new challenges: breathing air and dealing with gravity. From the very first moment of life, we start to explore and struggle to move into the world around us and to accomplish the experiences of survival explorations. Searching and smelling for food makes the head move, sucking follows to secure and provide nourishment, and screaming to express unfulfilled needs. These activities shape our neck, and we naturally develop lordosis in the cervical spine. The anterior space of the neck is protected in front, holding the air and food pathway, modulated by phonation.

The interaction with the outer world continues together with the challenge that gravity presents. The journey into gravity is shaped by the changes in our spine. From the convex curve of the cervical spine, concave curves start to appear in the thoracic spine (a kyphosis). A spine kyphosis is a place where we rest, lordoses are the mobile areas. To use Rolf Movement® vocabulary, kyphosis has a *phoric* function, meaning to carry, transport, and support. They lengthen and shorten according to our internal environmental demands and external ones.

Starting from the primary curve, our thoracic kyphosis, from there, we continue the development of the lordosis at the neck. This helps to lift the head while searching for nourishment. Then the lordosis at the lumbar spine will follow to help the trunk and head to have more distance from the ground and widen the field of vision. After that, the next lordosis will be the one at the knee and the support from the feet.



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## And We Are Erect!

The force of gravity has one direction: down. Our structure organizes around this vertical vector and moves around it. If, in fact, we are adaptable, then we move, we are plastic. Dr. Rolf taught us a method to reach flexibility and stability to cope with gravity. Improving elasticity is needed to take advantage of the force of weight associated with our mass. It gives us back its energy, and produces the rebound, allowing us to reach upward.

Standing on the Earth induces our muscular and fascial systems to react, keep balance, and establish a certain tonus. The lower body receives weight and provides the basic function to be the support as much as the upper body provides direction, orientation, and expression; the two halves are counterweights for each other. They are in relationship with each other; they establish a relationship to be able to occupy space with our physical reality.

We Rolfers are trained to improve the organization within body parts and with respect to the gravitational force, so as to enhance these relationships. An organized structure is synonymous with functional efficiency. And vice versa.

We stand on two feet to meet the ground and use the ground for support for all our parts. We reach upward, skyward, with the head, exploring the space around us to orient our actions. This is our *gravity project*. We need the ground to rest, for support, to feel stability, and we need space to project, to breathe, and to orient in space and time.

## Final Thought

The secret of learning to use gravity as a friendly force is to focus on improving relationships within our structure.

Rolf's 'Recipe' gave us this gravity point of view, that fascial manipulation and movement education can support people becoming more balanced in gravity. Also, we have the great contribution that French Rolfer Hubert Godard has brought to our work – understanding and feeling the body's response to gravity (Frank 1995). He invites us to ask these kinds of questions:

What prevents . . .

- . . . my breath to be full?
- . . . to have a balanced pelvis?
- . . . to land when I walk?
- . . . to use the ground to propel?
- . . . to have a spacious visceral space?
- . . . to use my senses to orient in space?
- . . . to perceive the wholeness of my body and my being?

And finally: What can help gravity to flow so that I am centered and safe, to stay and to move?

*Pierpaola Volpones discovered Rolfing SI through bodywork and her research into well-being and somatic expression. She studied in Munich, Germany with Stacey Mills and Michael Salveson in her Basic Training and with Michael Salveson and Jeffrey Maitland in her Advanced Training. Her Rolf Movement training took place in Italy with Janie French and Annie Duggan. She began her Rolfing SI and Rolf Movement teacher training almost twenty years ago, and she has been teaching since 2006. She runs a practice in Rimini, Italy, and teaches for the European Rolfing Association e.V. Her website is [www.volpones.it](http://www.volpones.it).*

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## Keywords

gravity; water; Earth; mass; ground; perception; skyhook; Ida Rolf; balance; weight; falling; energy; force; vertical; infancy; development; lordosis; kyphosis; relationship. ■

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Kathy McConnell

# Loving Gravity – Descartes' Decree

By Kathy McConnell, Certified Advanced Rolfer®, Rolf  
Movement Practitioner®

## Loving Gravity

*What if you could:*

Meet the ground  
beneath your feet.

Let go your fear  
of letting go.

Drop the blocks  
that keeps you boxed.

Clear a pathway  
of connection.

Re-imagine the spring  
in your step.

*Here's how:*

Take off your shoes.

Open the eyes of your feet.

Let gravity flow through.

Allow the Earth to love you back.

## Descartes' Decree

Our friend

René Descartes

Declared

That being depends on thinking.

“I think therefore I am.”

Does he mean

When I stop thinking

I stop being?

A mind uncluttered by thought

Is only unfamiliar

Not life-threatening.

More space in your mind

Does not mean less you.

More space in your mind

Means more you.

*Kathy McConnell is a Certified Advanced Rolfer and Rolf Movement Practitioner in the San Francisco Bay Area. During her twenty years of practice, she has assembled an eclectic palette of formal and self-directed training that influence her work, including craniosacral therapy, medical qigong, and Western esoteric studies. Through her poetry, she is experimenting with the language of embodiment that is awakened by Roling® Structural Integration and Rolf Movement. ■*