

## The Gravity Guiding System

**Robert M. Martin, M.D.**

Pasadena: Gravity Guidance, Inc., 5th Reprinting, 1981, 108 pages.

**Reviewed by:**

**Eoin St. John**

**Physical Therapy Systems**

**Houston, Texas 77077**

Major breakthroughs often seem simple and obvious after they have been made, and with the advantage of hindsight *The Gravity Guiding System* appears so simple, obvious, logical, and persuasive that one suspects it may be a major breakthrough in physical training, and especially in therapy for that very common human ailment, "back trouble." The publishing history of Dr. Martin's little book suggests that his is an idea whose time has come. It was originally published in 1975 and it was reprinted in 1979. In 1981 it was reprinted three times.

Dr. Martin's thesis is simple: turn humans upside down now and then and their backs, among other things, will benefit. The thesis attracted national attention when Richard Gere donned Dr. Martin's Gravity Inversion Boots in *American Gigolo*, hooked the boots over a bar, and hung upside down to study Swedish language tapes. The boots have since appeared a number of times on television; *P. M. Magazine* doubtless generated the most response. Local stations everywhere reported calls from people with aching backs seeking information about the boots. And soon enough, ads began appearing in national magazines: from *Runner's World* to *Esquire*.

The book *The Gravity Guiding System* is lightyears inferior to the equipment, the Gravity Inversion Boots and the Gravity Guiders. It is a simple and simplistic book, occasionally silly and often badly written. Martin felt it necessary to attack the idea that "backache is caused by the unfinished work of evolution," perhaps fearing that creationists would demonstrate against a man who advocated hanging like apes. He spends far too much time discussing evolution, even suggesting that the care and treatment of backache has gotten lost in the evolution brouhaha.

Martin painstakingly and repeatedly declares that gravity is not the villain in human backache. However, as Martin clearly demonstrates, gravity *is* the villain. Because gravity has the power to distort and deform, birds constantly rotate their eggs; and to protect humans from the deforming power of gravity, the developing child is suspended in liquid for nine months. But Martin does point out that gravity need not be a villain; it can, in fact, be something of a

hero: simply invert and let gravity work on you the other way for a while, decompressing the vertebrae it has been compressing for a lifetime.

Although his thesis is persuasive, his prose is not. Martin's high school English teacher would no doubt cringe at his numerous misplaced modifiers. And readers will be justly irritated by Martin's tendency to define the simplest words in parentheses, e.g., "viscera (internal organs)" three times, while he leaves such words as "proprioceptive," "scoliosis," and "lordosis" undefined. Nevertheless, most readers will forgive Martin, because most readers will have acquired the book with either Gravity Inversion Boots or the more expensive Gravity Guiders. And the products make the book important.

Testimonials indicate that inversion works. In fact, this writer suffered the proverbial "catch" in his back for years. It recurred after intense sporting activity involving bending and twisting (handball, racquetball, basketball, softball, weightlifting, etc.) and after long hours of sitting. But after three weeks of hanging upside down a few minutes a day, swinging upside down, and doing sit-ups from a hanging position, the recurrences became rare and the back became noticeably more flexible. Similar reports abound.

The inversion boots employ sound psychological strategy. A person's world is turned upside down, as it were, and a new outlook, a new perspective, is immediately achieved. And adults relive a childhood experience, replicating hanging from tree limbs and the like. This fact suggests the book's major weakness. People can be convinced that virtually anything is a wonder (or a cure): James Jones, faith healing, laetrile, mantras — the list is very long. And perhaps anything *can* be a wonder. If backs are benefited because of the fun of hanging upside down and not because of the forces applied during inversion, it does not matter. The benefits are the important thing. However, those who bought the book with Gravity Inversion Boots or Gravity Guiders certainly deserve the hard evidence that Dr. Martin only hints at.

He says, for example, "Experiments at an Eastern University have revealed that, on the average, the brain operates 7 percent faster and 14 percent more accurately when the body is placed in an inverted, inclined plane." No graduate student would dare write such a sentence. Martin is obligated to name the university, indeed, to tell the reader where he can find an account of the experiment if he so desires. This book cries out for a bibliography to enable readers to do research on the benefits of inversion themselves.

Certainly as inversion continues to catch on around the country the literature will become more visible. And if inversion continues to deliver relief to sufferers of back pain, Dr. Martin will certainly be forgiven the many weaknesses of his book. It is a wonderful theory, and Martin certainly seems to have an amazing product for helping countless people, but it is still a shoddy and disappointing book.