



Hibernation

It's late March and spring is here. I nearly wrote 'spring is here at last!', but that wouldn't be fair, as this past winter really hasn't been such a difficult one. It has been a bit of a strange winter this time; December and January seemed to me to be quite a bit colder than usual, and as we moved into February I was bracing for a really difficult time! But just then, the severe weather faded rather suddenly, and we had any number of very mild days from then on.

Here in the Kanto region where I live, there is of course plenty of difference between the winter and summer climate, in strong contrast to Vancouver in Canada, where I lived for many years. The seasons there are kept relatively mild by the influence of ocean currents, and it gets neither bitterly cold in winter, nor extremely hot in summer. That was a pleasant place to live, but I have to say I prefer the pattern here in Tokyo, with a wide variation in temperature throughout the course of the year.

Because of the way I live - in a home with no heating or cooling system - I really do feel in my body the passage of the seasons, perhaps more so than many of you who read this! And do you know, during the time that I have lived in this type of climate, I have noticed that major changes happen to my daily 'cycle' as the seasons progress, and the most obvious of these is the amount of sleep I get every night.

The time I go to bed most evenings doesn't vary with the season, usually somewhere around midnight, but the time I wake up certainly does. I use no alarm clock, and wake up naturally each morning at whatever time my body thinks is appropriate; in summer this is usually around 6, but in deep winter, it can be around two hours (or more!) later than that. The 'easy explanation' for this is that as I never close the curtains in my bedroom, it is the earlier sunrise that prompts the earlier waking in summer, but I think it goes beyond that. I actually seem to want more sleep during the cold months.

This makes sense when you think back to when humans lived in a more 'natural' environment, before we had strong shelters that protected us from wide variations in temperature. During a long and cold winter, people must have moved around a lot less than in summer, so perhaps humans have a slight tendency to 'hibernate' in winter, just as many animals do. And because my home is mostly unheated (except for my kotatsu), I think my body really feels the winter quite vividly, thus encouraging this hibernation effect.

I don't really like this extended sleeping habit. Although I sleep perfectly soundly and deeply, I would much rather be 'up and around' and active, rather than 'wasting' so much time in my futon!

But I have to admit that two of the most pleasant moments of my day come in my bedroom; the time when - after a long day filled with work - I gratefully slide under the cover ... "Oooooooooohhhh", and the moment when - eyes popping open in the morning - a fresh new day has arrived and it's time to get up and get busy.

What happens in between I have not the slightest idea ..

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