

# THE WEIGHT FACTOR

## CHANGES IN THE QUALITY OF THE BODY WEIGHT, BECOMING EITHER LIGHT OR FORCEFUL

Suppose you begin to swing your arm. As you swing it, you feel not only the flow of the swing, but the weight of the arm, its relationship to the pull of gravity. You might want to change the quality of the weight, and to do so in such a way as to not give in to the weight, but to produce an active change in the weight quality. You can change in one of two ways. Either you can increase the pressure of that weight, get behind it and push it, producing a forceful or strong quality of the weight, or withhold, withdraw, rarify the feeling of the weight, producing a quality of lightness. You might feel, in this particular action, a swing, that it is easiest to use force in the middle of the swing, as the arm moves downward, and that the feeling of lightness comes easiest at the ends of the swing with the upward motion. Light and strong are the elements or qualities of the weight factor.

If you have a heavy object to move, a heavy carton or piece of furniture, you may have to engage your weight using a forceful quality. If you lean against the object, giving in to your body weight, the object may not budge. Probably you will have to get behind your weight and really push. On the other hand, if the object you must move is a delicate and breakable one, such as a paper flower, or a thin wire sculpture, you will have to withhold the full weight of your body parts from crushing the object as you move it – your attitude toward your weight will necessarily be one of lightness.

As you observe changes in the quality of weight in people around you, you may find that people sometimes deal with themselves, with one another or with many objects as if they were either large pieces of furniture or delicate paper flowers. You might see examples of strength in a conversation where someone makes his point by supporting his statements with the impact of his body weight in gesturing. Someone who “feels strongly” or takes a “firm stand” probably does so by many repeated instances of the quality of strength in his accompanying movement. Lightness might appear in someone who gently and carefully helps an old lady across the street. Examples of strength in the beginning, middle and end of a movement phrase might appear respectively in a yank on a rope, a tennis serve, chopping a piece of wood. Tasks you might do with lightness include collating paper, where each sheet must be skimmed off the top of a pile; picking up splinters of a broken glass, fluffing out the gauzy layers of a tutu.

## CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE WEIGHT FACTOR

Sensation of weight – Effort-Shape does not describe perceptions or sensation, but only movement patterns which may result from these. Although sensation of weight is not a part of Effort description per se, it is a condition without which the qualities of lightness and strength cannot occur. A mover must be able clearly to sense his own body weight before he can actively change its quality.

Center of weight or center of gravity – The center of weight refers to the part of the body most involved in initiating shifts of weight and generally activating and supporting the body weight i.e., the pelvis. Activation of the center of weight is necessary for producing changes in the quality of the weight, either light or strong. Center of levity is a term sometimes used to refer to the upper trunk and more specifically to the sternum. Activation in the chest, sternum, ribs and upper back with support from the lower trunk, provide optimum conditions for producing lightness.

Shift of weight – Shifting the weight is a phrase used to describe the body weight when it changes place or support, no matter how slightly. Although a shift of weight is a change in weight distribution, it is not necessarily change in the quality of the weight, so that one may speak of weight shift without necessarily bringing in the strength and lightness.

Heaviness – Heaviness is often confused with strength and heavy is thought of as the opposite of light. “Heavy” and “light” as opposites, however, describe the condition of objects or people who are acted upon – lifted, carried, etc. – while a person who actively changes his weight quality improvement can best be described in terms of strong and light. Heaviness appears in movement as giving in to gravity, in tired, floppy movement, or sometimes in momentum swings when the weight is sensed but not yet actively strong. It is a useful descriptive term, but in Effort-Shape it is not the opposite of light, nor the same as strong.

Dell, Cecily. A Primer for Movement Description. Dance Notation Bureau, Inc., 1977. (Fourth printing, 1993)