Chapter Six
The Sensation of Weight

From food to music to the pleasure of a caress—the sensations of touch, taste, smell, and sound define and enrich our experience of the world. They are the raw materials of the poet’s language. But what poet rhapsodizes about weight? Even though it influences our every move, the expressive aspect of weight seems to be silent. But silent or not, the awareness of gravity is the foundation of many meditation practices, from Buddhist sitting practice to the martial arts. It is at the core of the practice of Sensory Awareness. Charlotte Selver, my teacher in this practice, recalls an early teacher, Heinrich Jacoby, asserting that “we are only a part of the mass of the earth.” When she objected, “But I am an individual!” Jacoby replied, “To your father you are his daughter, to the postmaster you are his customer, to the earth you are a part of the mass of the earth.”

This powerful reality that underlies meditation practice is also at the foundation of the visual arts, not only architecture and sculpture, but drawing and painting as well. The force of gravity gives substance to our movement and touching, and bridges these perceptions into painting. Before we explore these possibilities, you can experience for yourself what influence it might have on both your state of being and on your drawing. The experiments with weight are simple, but can be challenging. Although the pull of gravity influences everything we do, the actual experience of this force in our own bodies may not be so obvious. We are uncomfortably aware of gravity under the burden of too much weight. We can be thrilled when gravity is challenged as we ride on roller coasters or watch the dramatic leaps of ice skating and gymnastics. The actual sensation of weight just in itself can be far more subtle but just as dramatic in its effects.

Let your sense of movement and touching be influenced by the stone.
Experiencing Your Weight

Experiment: Whether you are sitting or standing, close your eyes, and notice where you are touching the chair or the floor. Under the floor is the earth. Can you give your weight to being supported by the earth, not only where you are touching it, but in your back, shoulders, and even in your head? If you are holding yourself away give this up and let yourself be supported. As you yield to the downward pull of the earth, follow it gradually until you are lying on the floor. Take your time, noticing all the steps in between. When the floor is fully supporting you, can you be awake to the downward pull throughout your body?

When you are ready, come up to standing again. Feel this new relationship to the earth, from your legs up through your back to your head. After a while slowly shift your weight from one foot to the other, noticing the point where the weight becomes equally distributed, and then moves to the other side. We shift our weight in this way many times a day, as we walk. Now we are giving this interaction with the earth our full attention.

Drawing with Your Weight

Experiment: Prepare a piece of paper, with your media beside it. Continuing to stand, place your hands on the paper and gradually let your weight come on to it with eyes closed. Feel the difference between pressing and giving your weight freely, from your feet clear to your head. As you let more weight on, and then take it off, you can have a dialogue with the mass of the earth through the medium of the paper. Then find the crayon or charcoal, sensing its weight. As you meet the paper with your crayon, let your weight come through as directly as possible. Then play with the shift of weight with the crayon, letting it go wherever it wants to go.

Including a Stone

Experiment: When the first drawing is complete, prepare another piece of paper, with your media ready beside you. Find a medium sized stone (2"x3"), and set it beside your paper and close your eyes again. When you feel ready find the stone and lift it. As you hold it in your hand, notice any influence of the stone inside of you. After a while follow the pull of the stone down to the table, gradually letting the table carry its weight. When you feel ready, pick the stone up again.

Find a drawing medium that feels right for this new exploration, and touch it to the paper with your eyes closed. Let your drawing be influenced by your experience of the stone, trusting what happens.

When the drawing has come to an end, open your eyes and take the time to see your stone. Draw again with your eyes open, letting your experience with closed eyes influence the way you touch and move on the paper. Your sense of weight can still be active, even with eyes open.

The sense of weight is active, even with eyes open.