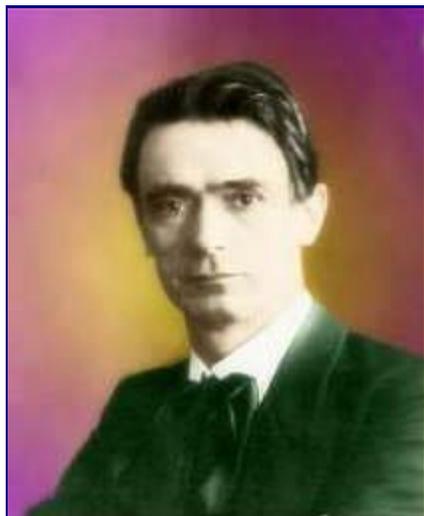


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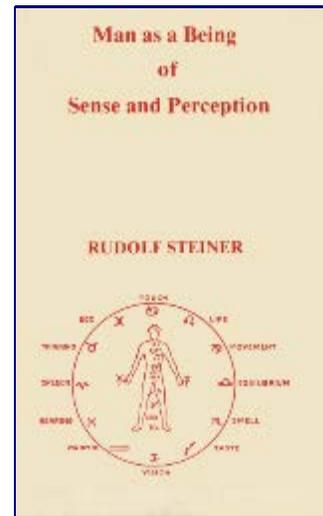


### A READER'S JOURNAL

**Man as a Being of Sense and Perception, GA# 206,**  
by  
**Rudolf Steiner**

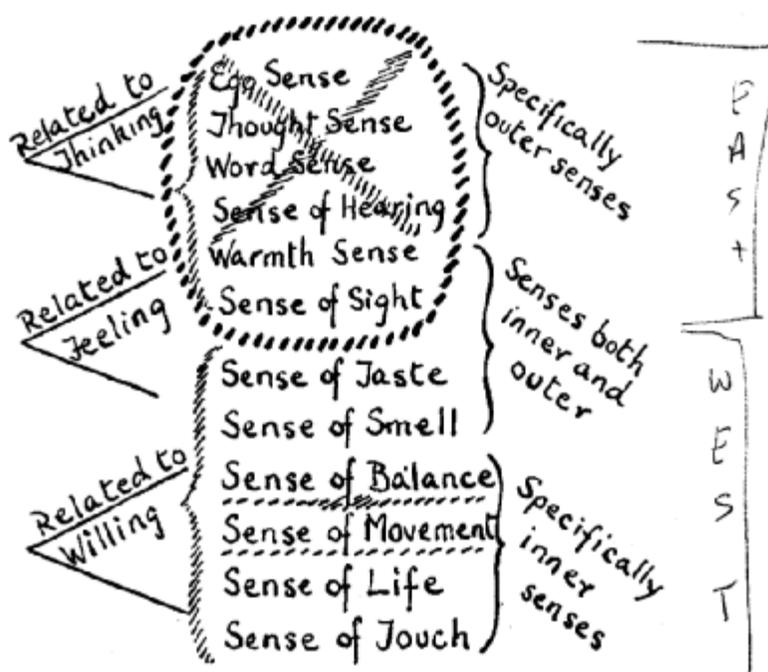
Three Lectures on July 22-24, 1921  
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1981

A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2011



There are five obvious organs which have senses related to them, and these are the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin, and they create our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. In addition to these are seven additional senses for which the sense organs are not obvious, such as our perception of the meaning of words or our perception of an ego in another person. One can watch the clever animated figure of Abraham Lincoln in Disneyland and enjoy listening to him talk and watching him move as he talks, but never, not even for a moment, does one have any sense of this machine possessing an ego. For example, if one were ask this *ersatz* Abe a question, he would ignore the question and never even notice it was asked. Amazing the technology which can produce such a life-like gadget to simulate an American President, but even more amazing is the technology which everyone in the audience watching it speak has in them: an individual sense of ego.

**[page 7, 8] We must ascribe to ourselves an ego-sense, just as we do a sense of sight. At the same time we must be quite clear that this ego-sense is something quite other than the development of consciousness of our own ego. Becoming conscious of one's own ego is not actually a perception; it is a completely different process from the process which takes place when we perceive another ego.**



Notice the diagram from page 21 at right. The Ego Sense is at the top and the rest of the senses follow down to Sense of Touch at the bottom. We have four Outer Senses with which we solely take in the world around us, followed by four Senses which deal with both Inner and Outer worlds, and

lastly four solely inner senses. We can also notice that the first four are related to Thinking, the second four to Feeling, and the third four to Willing. In addition, the top six senses are the primary ones in the East and the lower six senses in the West.

In these lectures, Steiner explains the twelve senses, seven of which are completely new to most people, such as the *word sense*[\(1\)](#).

**[page 8] . . . listening to words and becoming aware of a meaning in them is something quite different from hearing mere tone, mere sound. Although to begin with it is more difficult to point to an organ for the word-sense than it is to relate the ear to the sense of sound, nevertheless anyone who can really analyze the whole field of our experience becomes aware that within this field we have to make a distinction between the sense that has to do with musical and vocal sound and the sense for words.**

Look at the credits for any Broadway musical and there will be two prominent credits given: one for the words (lyrics) and the other for the music, e.g., Rogers & Hammerstein, Lerner & Lowe. The two names are tied together in our memory as if they were one person, but rather they represent the two inextricable components of a musical number which invoke both the word sense and the hearing sense in us as we listen to it.

In the words of others, we perceive their thinking with our sense of thought. As with the ego sense, our perception of others' thinking differs from our own thinking.

**[page 8] Further, it is again something quite different to perceive the thought of another within his words, within the structure and relationship of his words; and here again we have to distinguish between the perception of his thought and our own thought. It is only because of the superficial way in which soul-phenomena are studied to-day that no distinction is made between the thought which we unfold as the inner activity of our own soul-life, and the activity which we direct outwards in perceiving another person's thought. Of course, when we have perceived the thought of another, we ourselves must think in order to understand his thought, in order to bring it into connection with other thoughts which we ourselves have fostered. But our own thinking is something quite other than the perception of the thought of another person.**

Clearly our materialistic science does not make such diverse distinctions, instead science sorts the twelve senses into only five categories and blurs or ignores of them thereby. What does a materialistic science grasp best? The sense of touch! Everywhere in this science we find weight, density, position, and velocity calculations, all determined by the sense of touch, and those that aren't, use concepts from the sense of touch as their basis for understanding. The most baffling concepts of modern science involve concepts which violate our sense of touch. Examples include objects whose weight and size change when they approach the speed of light, objects such as photons which can be in several places at the same time, low-temperature liquids which defy gravity to climb out of their containers, and many other things. The whole range of quantum phenomenon is filled with counter-intuitive examples which defy our sense of touch.

**[page 8,9] Within the range of the senses, the sense of hearing, for example, is of course radically different from the sense of sight or the sense of taste. And having come to a clear conception of the sense of hearing or of the sense of sight, we then have to recognize a word-sense, a sense of thought, and an ego-sense. Most of the concepts current to-day in scientific treatises on the senses are actually taken from the sense of touch. And our philosophy has for some time been wont to base a whole theory of knowledge on this, a theory which actually consists of nothing but a transference of certain perceptions proper to the sense of touch to the whole sphere of capacity for sense-perception.**

Here are the *twelve senses* laid out by Rudolf Steiner, from top to bottom, from ego sense to sense of

touch, matching the diagram above taken from page 21.

[page 9, *italics added*] Now when we really analyze the whole range of those external experiences of which we become aware in the same way as we become aware, let us say, of the experiences of sight or touch or warmth, we get twelve senses, clearly distinguishable one from another. On earlier occasions I have enumerated them as follows: *First*, the ego-sense (see diagram, p. 21) which, as I have said, is to be distinguished from the consciousness of our own ego. By the ego-sense we mean nothing more than the capacity to perceive the ego of another man. The *second* sense is the sense of thought, the *third* the word-sense, the *fourth* the sense of hearing, the *fifth* the sense of warmth, the *sixth* the sense of sight, the *seventh* the sense of taste, the *eighth* the sense of smell, the *ninth* the sense of balance. Anyone who is able to make distinctions in the realm of the senses knows that, just as there is a clearly defined realm of sight, so there is a clearly defined realm from which we receive simply a sensation of standing as man in a certain state of balance. Without a sense to convey this state of standing balanced, or of being poised, or of dancing in balance, we should be entirely unable to develop full consciousness. *Tenth*: Next comes the sense of movement. This is the perception of whether we are at rest or in movement. We must experience this within ourselves, just as we experience the sense of sight. The *eleventh* sense is the sense of life, and the *twelfth* the sense of touch.

What does it mean to have four senses which are solely outer senses?

[page 10] First, we have four senses which unite us with the outer world beyond any doubt. They are the ego-sense, the sense of thought, the word-sense and the sense of hearing. You will unhesitatingly recognize that when we perceive the ego of another person, we are with our entire experience in the outer world, as also when we perceive the thoughts or words of another. As regards the sense of hearing it is not quite so obvious; but that is only because people have taken an abstract view of the matter, and have diffused over the whole of the senses the coloring of a common concept, a concept of what sense-life is supposed to be, and do not consider what is specific in each individual sense. Of course, one cannot apply external experiment to one's ideas upon these matters, but one has to be capable of an inner feeling for these experiences.

What does Steiner mean by "diffusing over our senses a concept"? In Steiner's first book, [Goethe's Theory of Knowledge](#), he explains how concepts developed in science, such as Newton's conception that a prism divides a light beam into *its component colors*. As Goethe and Steiner have both shown, this concept stands in way of one's truly understanding color as a phenomenological event to be studied, turning it instead into concept which drives all studies of light. In effect, Newton diffused our sense over his concept of light. Concepts can skew our perception such that we are no longer receiving unbiased data, but what we expect to receive according to some dearly held conception.

Eyes and ears let in information and by the conception held by science, one would consider both of them as outer perceptions. But we don't close our ears when we sleep, only our eyes. Something must be different between the two.

[page 10] Customary thinking overlooks the fact that hearing, since its physical medium is the air in movement, takes us straight into the outer world. And you have only to consider how very external our sense of hearing actually is, compared with the whole of our organic experience, to come to the conclusion that a distinction must be made between the sense of hearing and the sense of sight. In the case of the sense of sight we realize at once, simply by observing its organ, the eye, how what is conveyed by this an inner process. When we sleep we close our eyes; we do not shut our ears. Such seemingly simple, trivial facts point to something of deep significance for the whole of human life.

**And though when we go to sleep we have to shut off our inner senses, because during sleep we must not perceive through sight, yet we are not obliged to close our ears, because the ear lives in the outer world in a totally different way from the eye. The eye is much more a component of our inner life; the sense of sight is directed much more inwards than is the sense of hearing . . .**

With the sense of warmth we reach the second quaternary of senses, the Inner-Outer senses, senses which interrelate our inner and outer worlds. They are our senses of warmth, sight, taste, and smell. I was reminded of my own sense of warmth this sunny Spring-like afternoon. We had moved our cars out of the garage to organize it, and I got into my car to move it back into the garage. "What's that strange experience?" I thought as I leaned over to start the motor? "Oh, I remember, it's warmth!" It's been a long winter, and actually feeling warmth when getting into a car was a novel feeling over the past three months. I read decades ago that a person can feel the difference of as slight as a millionth-of-a-degree, which is about the heat added when a person enters a room where you were standing. Even though you are looking away from the door, the minuscule incremental heat registers on the back of your neck. Without hearing anything, you will turn around to see who it is because you have felt a warmth all the way across the room. Such a sensitive response to a stimulus certainly deserves to be called a separate sense of warmth.

Note in the next passage which talks about "drinking acid" that the vinegar in common salad dressing contains acetic acid.

**[page 11] The next four senses, the senses of warmth, sight, taste, and smell, are so to say on the border between outer and inner; they are both outer and inner experiences. Just try to think of all the experiences that are conveyed to you by anyone of these senses, and you will see how, whilst in them all there is an experience lived in common with the outer world, there is at the same time an experience within yourself. If you drink an acid, and thus call into play your sense of taste, you have undoubtedly an inner experience with the acid, but you have also, on the other hand, an experience that is directed outwards, that can be compared with the experience of another man's ego or of the word. But it would be very bad if, in the same way, a subjective, inner experience were to be involved in listening to words. Just think, you make a wry face when you drink vinegar; that shows quite clearly that along with the outer experience you have an inner one; the outer and inner experiences merge into one another.**

How can you listen objectively to someone whose very words act on you as either a delicious wine or someone whose words are like a wine which has turned into vinegar? We might accuse the former of "sweet-talking" us and the latter of "spewing vile words" at us. The sweetness and the vileness is not so much in the words used, but in the way they are delivered.

**[page 11] If the same thing were to happen in the case of words, if, for example, someone were to make a speech, and you had to experience it inwardly in the way you do when you drink vinegar or wine or something of that sort, then you would certainly never be objectively clear about the man's words, about what he says to you. Just as in drinking vinegar you have an unpleasant experience and in drinking wine a pleasant one, so in the same way you would color an external experience. It is better if you do not color the external experience when you perceive the words of another. Rightly understood, that is just where morality comes in.**

Humans who are anchored strongly into their middle senses may judge the thoughts and actions of other with these senses. It is as if they only experience others with the senses of warmth, sight, taste, and smell which are the primarily senses of the animal kingdom. They become like a human without a head.

**[page 12] Everything becomes subjective experience. To reduce the higher senses to the character of the lower ones is immoral. It is quite possible to bring the moral into**

**connection with our whole world-conception, whereas at the present time the fact that men do not know how to build a bridge between what they call natural law and what they call morality, acts as a destructive influence undermining our entire civilization.**

It may seem strange to some that the sense of touch falls under the rubric of an Inner Sense. After all, when we touch something, aren't we in direct contact with the outer world of materiality? What could be more *outer* than that?

**[page 12, 13] When we come to the next four senses, to the sense of balance, the sense of movement, the sense of life and the sense of touch, we come to the specifically inner senses. For, you see, what the sense of balance conveys to us is our own state of balance; what the sense of movement conveys to us is the state of movement in which we ourselves are. Our sense of life is that general perception of how our organs are functioning, of whether they are promoting life or obstructing it. In the case of the sense of touch, it is possible to be deceived; nevertheless, when you touch something, the experience you have is an inner experience. You do not feel this chalk; roughly speaking, what you feel is the impact of the chalk on your skin . . . the process can of course be characterized more exactly. In the sense of touch, as in the experience of no other sense in the same way, the experience lies in the reaction of your own inner being to an external process.**

There is a paradox we can observe in the twelve senses: the outermost senses (1-4) are the ones we experience most subjectively and individually; the innermost senses (9-12) are the ones we experience most objectively. The middle senses (5-8) handle the interactions between the inner and outer world.

**[page 14] Thus you see that the truly subjective senses are the senses which are specifically external; it is they which have the task of assimilating into our humanity what is perceived externally through them. The middle group of senses shows an interplay between the outer and the inner world. And through the last group a specific experience of what we are as part of the world-not-ourselves is conveyed to us.**

Milk has wonderful constructive forces for babies — that is why they can live for over a year on eating nothing else and grow strong and healthy. Adults might naively think that such a diet would be monotonous and unpleasant for a baby — nothing could be farther from the truth. Adults who try to save their child from monotony by switching to solid foods as soon as possible are acting irresponsibly. Steiner says elsewhere that milk is tasted by the entire body of the baby. That is hard for us to imagine, but the baby's entire body is a taste organ, and its milk must taste like the most delicious ice cream might taste to us. That ability to taste food with various parts of our body lives in us as adults, but we are unaware of it because of the various distractions of civilization.

**[page 15, 16] The sense of taste still develops to some extent on the surface. There we do have a clear consciousness of it. But although our whole body tastes (with the exception of the limb-system, but actually even that too), very few men are able to detect the taste of foods in the stomach, because civilization, or culture, or refinement of taste has not developed so far in that direction. Very few men indeed can still detect the taste of the various foodstuffs in their stomachs. You do still taste them in some of the other organs, but once the foodstuffs are in the stomach, then for most men it is all one what they are — although unconsciously the sense of taste does very clearly continue throughout the whole digestive tract. The entire man tastes what he eats, but the sensation very quickly dies down when what has been eaten has been given over to the body.**

The sense of sight seems obvious to scientists because there are eyes, the clearly demonstrable organs of sight. But if we restrict ourselves to calling senses only those which have such organs, we will not advance in our understanding of what constitutes the full human being. Anyone who claims the human

being has only five senses is demonstrating a full understanding of the obvious facts, but little more. For example, how are our senses distributed among our thinking, feeling, and willing functions?

**[page 19, 20] Of course there must be a reason for the fact that sight has a physical-sensible organ of so specific a nature, but this does not justify us in restricting the range of the senses to those which have clearly perceptible physical organs. If we do that it will be a very long time before we shall reach any higher conception; we shall meet only what happens in everyday life. The important thing is really to distinguish between what is subjective in man, what is his inner soul-life, and the sphere wherein he is actually asleep. There, man is a cosmic being in relation to all that is conveyed by his senses. In that sphere he is a cosmic being. In your ordinary soul-life you know nothing of what happens when you move your arm -- not at least without a faculty of higher vision. That movement is a will-activity. It is a process which lies as much outside you as any other external process, notwithstanding the fact that it is so intimately connected with you.**

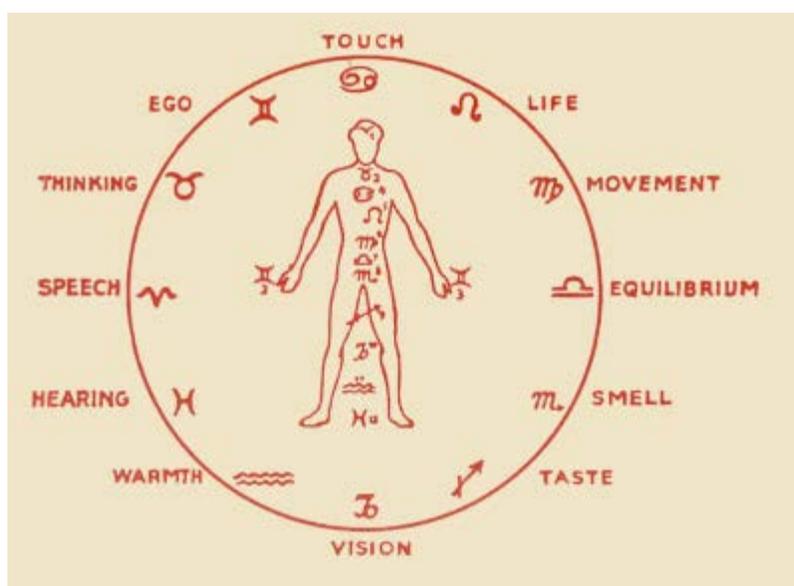
In the next three passages, Steiner reveals how our thinking, feeling, and willing each share one-third of our twelve senses, going down Figure 21 above from the sense of ego down to the sense of touch.

**[page 20, *THINKING* ] On the other hand, there can be no idea, no mental image, in which we are not ourselves present with our consciousness. Thus when you distinguish these three spheres, you find something else as well. In all that your ego-sense, your thought-sense, your word-sense, your sense of hearing convey to you, thereby constituting your soul-life, you receive what is predominantly associated with the *idea*.**

**[page 20, *FEELING* ] In the same way, everything connected with the senses of warmth, sight, taste and smell has to do with *feeling*. That is not quite obvious with regard to one of these senses, the sense of sight. It is quite obvious with regard to taste, smell and warmth, but if you look into the matter closely you will find that it is also true of sight.**

**[page 20, *WILLING* ] In contrast with this, all that has to do with the senses of balance, movement, life, and even with the sense of touch (although that is not so easy to see, because the sense of touch retires within us) is connected with the *will*. In human life, everything is connected, and yet everything is metamorphosed.**

We have looked at the twelve senses and their relationship to the functions of the full human being. There is one aspect of the senses which is illustrated in the cover diagram which is not discussed in these three lectures, and that is how the twelve senses map onto the twelve astrological signs. For an exercise, one might place one's family and friends onto this diagram according to their astrological signs and see for yourself if each person demonstrates in their life a prominence of the sense associated with their sign. Let me tell you a story about myself. I had for many years a favorite masseuse who shared my astrological sign. I didn't have to tell her how much or how little pressure to use, she was always just right. After she moved away from my area, I could not find another masseuse that I liked. I understood how she knew because her sense of touch was as important to her as it is to me. We are both Cancerians, situated at the top of the



circular diagram under the Sense of Touch. Perhaps you will notice similar things which will help you to consider all the twelve senses and your own special sense to have meaning and reality.

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----- *Footnotes* -----

**Footnote 1.**

Our word-sense is so strong that we can best grasp it in action when we listen to an expert in double-talk. We are hearing words spoken as if they had sense, but they do not, and we immediately sense something is wrong.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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