

The I and the Body in Sensory Existence

~ Claus-Peter Röh

Two polarities come into play now when we consider sense experience. Where are the twelve senses with regard to the young person? We have two streams. One is the stream which we bring from the past, from Isis to Sophia, the stream of wisdom. These are the inner images we bring from life before birth. Then through the twelve senses we turn toward the world, toward the future, from which the sense-experiences approach us.

An example from the “past” stream can be seen in questions a four-year-old asks. “Mummy, how does God make hair grow?” The parent answers, “It grows like grass.” The next question is, “How does God make legs and arms grow?” These are questions coming from the inner stream of wisdom.

Then from the other stream come other questions. A little child is sleeping in the car and is wakened by a loud bang. He wakes with a start, jerks eyes open, and stretches his arms like a marionette moved from outside. But then the child continues to sleep. The I of the child is outside in the surroundings. It perceives what has happened, and reacts in the limbs, but the child goes on sleeping. What happens in the middle realm of the soul? The senses go on this stream, to the future. Little children intensively take in the environment in their experience and then do something with it.

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The sense of touch is the foundation of the twelve senses. Even before birth the mother may notice the movement of the child, the touching within. The birth process itself is fundamentally woven through by the sense of touch. Following this the child is swaddled and held, and soon after that he starts to grasp the fingers of the parent. This sense of touch has immense power. Where is it based? On the one hand, we perceive the world as a reality through the sense of touch. But as this sense brings us to the border between body and world, at the same time it brings an experience of the self in the body. Herein lies the mysterious double aspect of the sense of touch. As we perceive the outside world at the sense-border of the body, at the same time we perceive our-

selves as self within the body. Rudolf Steiner, in describing the sense of touch, explained that the important aspect of touch is that the human being experiences himself in his body by finding himself inwardly. This is the double aspect of touching.

To experience this dual aspect we might remember for ourselves an experience from childhood. An example is offered by two brothers in an old farmhouse. The parents have gone to a party and the boys are left to put themselves to bed. The older brother asks if the younger is scared. The little one says no. Then the older brother goes to sleep and the little one stays awake. He wonders if the parents actually locked the door. He can't sleep unless he is absolutely sure. He walks through the big house in the dark, feeling his way over rough creaking stairways, cold stone floors, warm wooden floors, doorways and thresholds. His hands are touching banisters, door handles, edges of walls. The more touching and feeling there is, the stronger grows his confidence of “I am I.” He gets to the door and finds that the door is locked. Then there he has an inner feeling of strength. “I know my home. I can do this.” Then he returns to bed peaceful and quiet. Touch is deeply connected with I-awareness.

From the perspective of anthroposophy, there is always a higher sense linked with a foundational sense. [*The twelve senses as described by Rudolf Steiner were written on the board. These are divided into the four foundational senses of touch, life, self-movement, and balance; the middle soul senses of smell, taste, sight, and warmth; and the four higher/social/spiritual senses of hearing, word, thought, and the sense to perceive the ego of the other human being.*] The four foundational and the four higher senses are inter-related. What we develop in terms of security comes through our organ for touch. Polar opposite to this sense of touch is the ability to perceive the I of the other person. At the borders of the sense of touch I am experiencing myself as an I from within. The I or ego sense is a sense to experience not myself, but the I of the other being from without. What is the organ for the sense of I? With

touch it is the skin and mucous linings. The organ for the sense of I is the *gestalt* of the human being itself, the human form as a unified whole. For a real ego-meeting, it is often very important to stand or sit really upright in front of the other.

I can perceive you if I can meet you. I have an organ to perceive you as an I. Through intuition I go into the other and perceive both other and self. The sense of the other person's I comes from the outside through the ego sense, and the sense of oneself comes from the inside with the sense of touch. Rudolf Steiner states that this sense is there so we can spiritually extend our sense of touch/I beyond the body.

There is a question about children who do not have self-confidence, children who are anxious. These children can identify more strongly with their own body if we can work with them on the sense of touch. They often respond well to working the earth, soil, clay, and other materials on the way to overcoming fear and gaining self-confidence.

In the morning when waking up, sometimes we can observe the second of the lower senses, which usually stays completely unconscious. But when we notice upon awaking that one place in the body is not right or in order, this sense says immediately, "There it is." This life sense or well-being sense perceives us as a whole human being, and informs us if something is wrong with the life forces or with our health. As educators we try to make it possible for the child to have many moments of feeling harmonious and healthy. What is now the unconscious side of the sense of life? If a child experiences a pain consciously, we immediately put a bandage on it. Unconsciously the I of the human being in the body has the experience through the life sense that it is one organism. I experience myself as a unity, as a wholeness. And this unity, I experience as well-being. If we succeed as parents and educators in helping the children to build up and strengthen this unity, the bodily experience of the life sense transforms itself into the higher ability of sense of thought.

Some months ago in an educational support conference with a focus on math, those upbuilding steps between sense of life and sense of thought showed themselves with differentiated clarity. The quality of a particular math operation can be grasped by the children in thought only when in the body-experience through the sense of life there is first this experience of inner unity. The experience of the body-unity later becomes the foundation of the experience of mathematical unity.

At the conference it became shockingly clear how many children today have to live afresh through the ex-

periences of the basic senses with tremendous force and help, so that they can again build up an inner ground to serve as a foundation—for the understanding of the different math operations, for instance. This inner ground is not to be thought of as material. Even though the sense of touch in its primary experience engages intensively with the outer sense world of objects, ground, other people, in its mature stage, soul forces are building the confidence and security which then inwardly can carry the process of doing mathematics.

When we ask how we can help children who are not awake to learning, we find that everything concerning numeracy depends upon this feeling oneself as a unity. I first have to experience myself as a unity before my thinking can proceed into mathematical operations. The sense of life and thinking are existentially connected.

In a lecture on September 2, 1916, Rudolf Steiner described how the four foundational or will senses work "from within" as the basis for the development of the higher senses in their perception "from without." In this way, each of the basic senses has a higher sense which corresponds to it:

I-sense	Thought	Word	Hearing
Warmth	Sight	Taste	Smell
Touch	Life	Self	Balance
		movement	

In this chart, the mighty pedagogical and biographical influence of the twelve senses on the relationship of "I" and body shows itself. The richer the experience of the bodily, foundational senses in early childhood, the more freely and strongly the ego can develop new soul capacities out of this wellspring.

The confidence-in-life of the touch experience transforms into the ability to perceive the I of the other from without; the experience of identity with the unity of the bodily organization in the sense of life becomes the ability to perceive thoughts and further develop them; the joy of outer movement can later become the joy of perceiving language out of one's inner self, the ability to move freely in language; the sense of balance is connected to the physical organization of the ear, along with the sense of hearing—both senses that contain the gesture of completely giving up oneself to the surroundings. ♦

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