



# Initiation through Life

---

## Two Thresholds in Context with Spiritual Science and Experience

### **Threshold**

In our everyday world, a threshold defines the boundary between two rooms or spaces. When crossing a threshold one may step from one room into another, or out of the house into the garden. In ordinary sense-perceptible consciousness there is no problem. As long as we stay oriented we know that we have stepped from one space into another, and we will also be able to find our way back.

Spiritual Science uses the term **Crossing the Threshold** to describe a change of consciousness – that is, for crossing from everyday consciousness into a transpersonal, transcendental or spiritual consciousness. This may be associated with some more or less memorable *spiritual experiences*.

Unlike the crossing of a threshold in the physical world, crossing the threshold into the spiritual world can happen unconsciously. Without noticing it, we have left one space behind us and are unaware that we have entered into a new one. We may not know where we have arrived nor the way back again.

In his movie when describing his psychotic experiences, the Swiss director Edgar Hagen raises this question: *For a long time I have been asking myself about the origin of this fear. The fear to suddenly lose the threads between my fingers, to descend into chaos and finally to completely lose my mind. Is it possible that this fear only arises, because we don't know the way back? (Edgar Hagen: Someone beside you)*

### **Inner and/or Outer Threshold**

Spiritual Science, Spiritual Traditions and Scripture describe two different ways of crossing the Threshold:

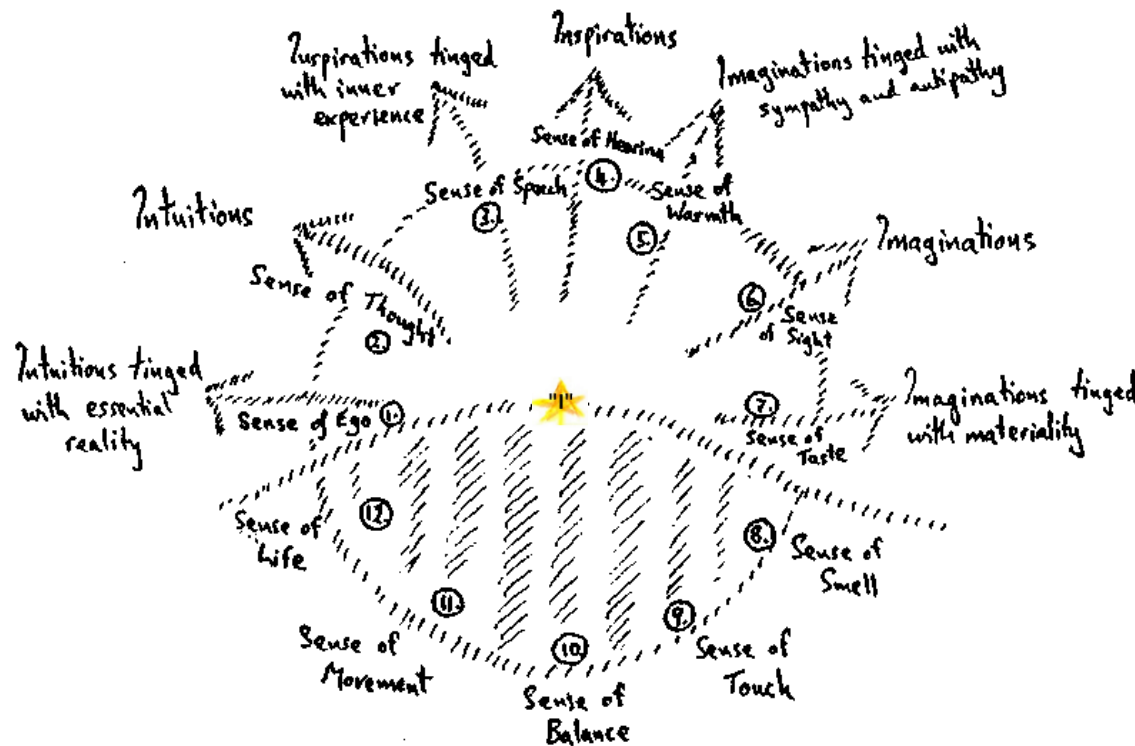
1. Across an **Inner Threshold**. This leads to an encounter with the spiritual energies or entities which created and constantly recreate our **Body** or in a wider sense our **Instrument**. This direction of crossing is prepared by inner meditative activities connected to the so called **Mystic Path**. All meditations which work towards an inner focus, stillness and detachment are predominantly concerned with the **Inner Threshold**, and lead into the **spiritual inner world**, the **microcosm**.
2. Across an **Outer Threshold**. This leads to an encounter with the spiritual energies or entities which created and constantly re-create the **Natural World** around us. This direction of crossing is prepared by meditations, which can be very dynamic activities including chanting, breathing and dance. It is connected to the so called **Ecstatic Path** or the **Shamanistic Path**. All meditations working with the strengthening of the 'I' and expanding consciousness, are predominantly concerned with the **Outer Threshold**, and lead into the **outer spiritual world**, the **macrocosm**.

### **The two Thresholds and the twelve Senses**

In his lecture *Man's Twelve Senses in Their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition*, Rudolf Steiner describes how the senses relate to the thresholds. In our understanding, Steiner is one of very few spiritual teachers clearly addressing two thresholds and two different ways of crossing, which also relate to two different meditative paths: the Mystic and the Shamanistic. Commonly only the Mystic Path is seen and acknowledged as a valid approach towards Spiritual Development.



Rudolf Steiner describes as follows ... It goes without saying that when our soul and spirit leave the bodily sheath, they go through the senses. [Outer] - We go through the external senses therefore in an outward direction, through the sense of taste, sight, warmth, hearing, speech, thinking and ego. [Inner] - Later we shall see whither we go when we penetrate the other boundary where the senses open themselves to what is within, press inwards. [Outer] - Thus we penetrate through the senses to the outside, with our soul and spirit, by leaving to some extent the boundary of our body. Here, towards the outside, we pass by our sense of sight for example; in other words we press outwards with our soul and spirit by leaving behind our instrument of sight. When leaving behind our physical eyes and start seeing with our eye of the soul, we move into the world, we come into that region where Imagination holds sway. ...



Thus, I have given you here the twelve senses which form the complete system of the sense organs. From this you can straightaway see that a certain number of our senses are directed more towards the **outside**, are adapted more to penetrate the outer world. When we look upon the whole (see diagram) as the total extent of our sense-world, we can say: Ego-sense, sense of thinking, word-sense, sense of hearing, sense of warmth, sense of sight, sense of taste - these are the senses that are **more outwardly directed**.

On the other hand, where we perceive ourselves rather in the things, where we perceive more the effect of the things upon us, we have the remaining senses: life-sense, sense of movement, sense of balance, and the senses of touch and smell. **They form rather the sphere of the human being's interior being and are senses which open themselves in an inward direction, and mediate our relation to the cosmos through perception of what is within** (see shaded area in diagram). Thus, when we have the complete system of the senses we can say: **We have seven senses directed more towards outside**. The seventh sense is already uncertain, namely the sense of taste which stands right on the boundary between what has to do with external bodies, and the effect the external-bodies have upon us. **The other five senses are those which show**

**us completely inward processes playing a part in us**, which however are the effects the outer world has upon us. (GA199, 08/08/1920: Man's Twelve Senses in Their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition) [Star and "I" placed by KHF]

## Crossing the Threshold Unconsciously

In his lecture *Esoteric Prelude to an Exoteric Consideration of the Social Question*, Rudolf Steiner talks for the first time about the concept that humanity as a whole is crossing the Threshold to the spiritual world unconsciously. ... If I want to characterise the most important thing that is happening to humanity as a whole at the present moment of world evolution [1919] ... I must compare it with the experience that an individual has –**consciously however** [as a result of esoteric practices] – when the individual crosses the threshold ... into the supersensible world. You all know from the description I have given of this **individual experience**

in my book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*, that the crossing of the threshold is an event of deepest significance for the human being. On this side of the threshold is the **sense world** for the human consciousness, and on the other, the **supersensible world**. ...

The constitution of soul that one has here in the sense world, that is suited to live ... in the sense world: one cannot come into the supersensible world with that. Here in the sense world our soul forces are ... melted together, so that we never have the experience in our sense life of these soul forces being separated. Anyone who did not have a certain amount of willing in their soul at the same time that they were thinking, even though in a latent form, would not be really healthy physically. ... **But as soon as we cross the threshold into the supersensible world** — that is, as soon as we get our soul to the stage where we are actually surrounded by supersensible beings, by supersensible deeds of these beings, just as formerly we were surrounded by a world of sense things and sense happenings ..., **then there takes place in our soul an absolute separation of thinking, feeling, and willing**. As you have been able to gather from the description in *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, we must have so schooled ourselves that we are able then to summon sufficient power to hold together with our "I" these three elements of the soul life: thinking, feeling, and willing— **otherwise we would split up into three persons**. ...

This process [crossing the threshold into the spiritual world] is going on in the unconscious of every human being ... is what one must discover today through spiritual science. It shows also how necessary spiritual science is to humanity today. **For the crossing of this threshold must truly not remain in the unconscious**. We must become aware of it, otherwise we will sleep right through, or at least dream right through, an event that is very important for us. And this fifth post-Atlantean period is the very period in which we should be **extending consciousness**. But we cannot extend our consciousness of the most vital thing that is happening to humanity in any other way than by rising out of mere sense-science into spiritual science. ...

In former ages ... in the clairvoyance of Atlantean times, human beings did not dream in mysticism but had contact through mystic knowledge with reality. Also, they did not merely sleep in wisdom. ... they had a wisdom in which they were connected with the central forces of the world, that are at the same time the central forces of the human being. But these faculties ebbed away. They had to, in order that human beings might then seek within themselves for those strong powers that were previously given them by spiritual beings without any effort on their part. **Today we are crossing the threshold, humanity as a whole; and we must develop out of our inner self the power with which to awaken mysticism, which otherwise by its very nature sleeps within us — by our own power to call mysticism from its dreaming to an experience of the spirit. And also, by our inner activity, inner force, to raise what is otherwise dead abstract science to actual experience of supersensible spiritual reality**. Today, my dear friends, this is in our power. We must undertake the necessary training. (GA 192, 01/05/1919)

The above quotes from Steiner illustrate an attempt to raise awareness for the modern condition and our changed relationship to spiritual perception. And they are a call, or almost a pledge, for us to awaken in our spiritual striving.

## **Phenomena and Consequences**

In the following extract, Rudolf Steiner describes what happens to the human being if the crossing of the threshold happens unprepared and unconsciously. ... *At the moment when the human being enters the spiritual world, the human being immediately becomes a triple being. The thinking goes its own way, the feeling goes its own way, the willing goes its own way. So, you can think in the spiritual world, have thoughts which have nothing to do with your willing; but **these thoughts are illusions**. You can have feelings which have nothing to do with your willing; but **these feelings contribute to your undoing, not to your advancement**.*

...





*That is the essential thing, that when a person approaches the threshold of the spiritual world it seems to them that their thinking flies out into distant space and that their feeling goes beyond their memory. ...*

*Feeling leads you completely out of the time in which you have lived since childhood.*

*And willing, if you take it seriously, leads you ever farther back in time, back to your previous earth lives. That is something which happens immediately, dear friends, when you really come to the threshold of the spiritual world. **The physical body ceases holding you together. One no longer feels within the confines of the skin; one feels split into parts.***

*You feel as though your **thoughts**, which were previously confined by feelings, are **streaming out into cosmic space and becoming cosmic thoughts**. Your **feelings** seem to go back in time in the spiritual world between your last death and your present earth life. And with your volition (power of **will**) you feel yourself in your previous earth life.*

*It is just this splitting of the human being – I described it in my book [How to Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds](#) – which causes difficulties upon entering the spiritual world, because your thoughts expand. They had previously been held together and now stream out into cosmos space. At the same time, they become almost imperceptible. So, one must achieve the ability to perceive the thoughts which have thus expanded.*

*Feeling is no longer permeated by thoughts, for the thoughts have gone, so to speak. **So, your feeling can only turn prayerfully, with reverence and devotion, to the beings with whom you pass your life between death and a new birth on earth. This is possible if one has cultivated such reverence for the spiritual world in life.*** (GA270a, 29/02/1924)

## Conclusion

On our own biographical journeys, through our self-reflection and through our work as Biography Consultants and Psychotherapists, we have met threshold phenomena as Steiner describes. We have come to the conclusion that the modern condition asks for Spiritual Science as a framework to contextualise such phenomena, and that self-reflective work and a conscious spiritual striving contribute strongly to a sense of coherence. And thereby to mental, soul and physical resilience. This insight, and the observation that most Anthroposophic contributions are mainly concerned with the *mystic path*, has led us to design a Course on *Initiation through Life*, with the hope that we can present a more holistic approach – one which acknowledges both: inner and outer (mystic and shamanistic) paths.

## Please Note

In the above we have quoted extensively from Rudolf Steiner to present the overall picture of crossing the threshold using his words and concepts. In our courses, we follow Bernard Lievegoed's guiding image of trying to *make anthroposophy operational* and therefore we draw on our own knowledge and understanding.

Canberra, April 2022

*Karl-Heinz Finke & Laura Summerfield*