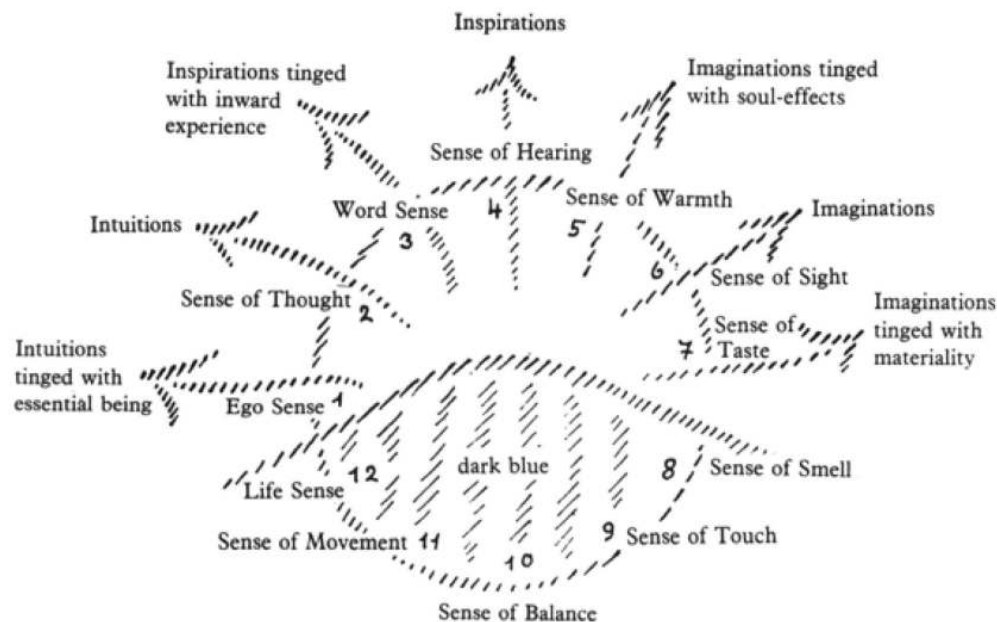


Trials, Thresholds and *Initiation through Life*

Karl-Heinz Finke

Introduction to our Training Module *Trials and Thresholds – Awakening to the Initiation through Life*



Rudolf Steiner's board drawing, Man's 12 Senses ... CW199

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Clarifying some Terms

Trials and Initiation Processes

Trial is a term used for **tests** on a path to acquire *Occult, Esoteric, Spiritual or Higher Knowledge*; ultimately the path is about striving towards **Initiation** (Enlightenment). To demonstrate their readiness and to progress to the next level of their training, candidates would face a test or trial. In some occult trainings these trials were very rigorous, and candidates were punished, harmed, and even died. The trainings or Initiation Processes happened in seclusion from the world in a remote area or behind walls. Often these trainings were part of Mystery Schools or Mystery Centres, which ended in Europe under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The Christian replacement of these mystery schools are monasteries, monastic orders and orders of Knights (warriors who gave an oath to serve the higher good of the church or church leaders).

In social settings, various rites of passage are similar to trials.

Initiation through Life

In the following text, *Man's Twelve Senses in their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition*, Rudolf Steiner repeatedly uses phrases like *initiation through life*, pointing to the fact, that in our time daily (social) life offers challenges, which could be seen as equivalent to these trials. Exploring life incidents with *trial / test* qualities, is part of this Course.

Thresholds

A threshold is the boundary between two rooms. By crossing the threshold one steps 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 room into another, and will also find our way back.

Spiritual Science uses the term **Crossing the Threshold** to describe a change of consciousness. Namely for crossing from everyday consciousness into a transpersonal, transcendental or spiritual consciousness, with more or less memorable *spiritual experiences* in their wake.

In distinction to crossing a threshold in the physical world, crossing the threshold into the spiritual world can happen unconsciously. Without noticing it, we have left one room behind us and are unaware that we have just stepped into a new one; we do not know where we have arrived and do not know the way back.

In his movie and describing his psychotic experiences the Swiss director Edgar Hagen raises the 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?*

Inner and Outer Thresholds

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

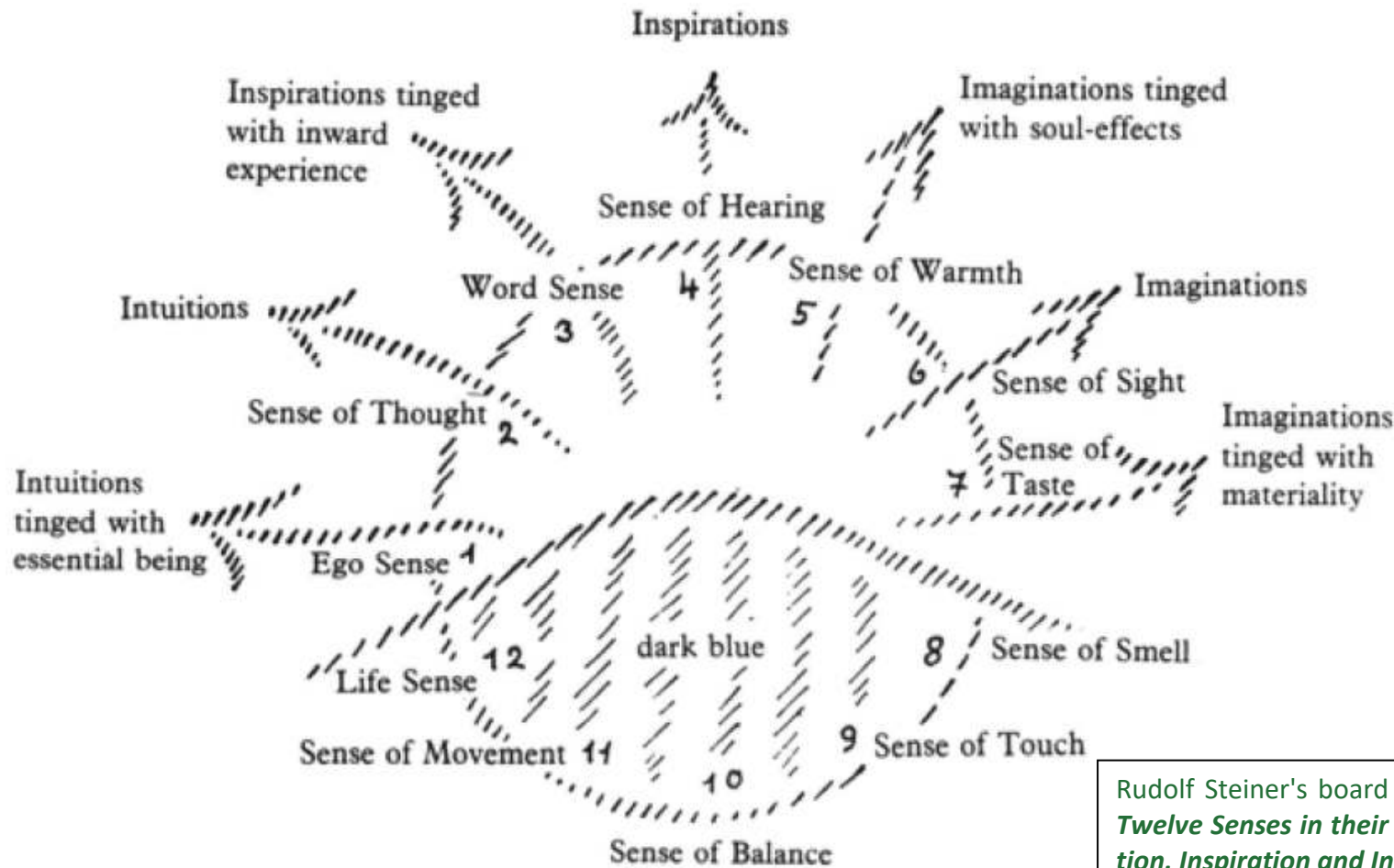
1. Across the **Inner Threshold**, leading to an encounter with the spiritual energies or entities which created and constantly recreate our **Body** or in a wider sense our **Instrument**. This direction of crossing is prepared by inner meditative activities connected to the so called **Mystic Path**. All meditations which work towards an inner focus, stillness and detachment are predominantly concerned with the **Inner Threshold**.
2. Across the **Outer Threshold**, leading to an encounter with the spiritual energies or entities which created and constantly recreate 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**.

The following quote and image by Rudolf Steiner indicate that our **Twelve Senses** are the doorways to the spiritual worlds and energies beyond the two thresholds:

... It goes without saying that when our soul and spirit leave the bodily sheath, they go through the senses. We go through the external <outer> senses therefore in an outward direction, through the sense of taste, sight, warmth, hearing, speech, thinking and ego. Later we shall see whither we go when we penetrate the other boundary where the senses open themselves to what is within <inner>, press inwards. 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...

Source Man's Twelve Senses in their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition, CW 199 – 3rd Lecture, 8th Aug 1920



Rudolf Steiner's board drawing from *Man's Twelve Senses in their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition*, CW 199

Trials, Initiation Processes and Kali Yuga, a Dark Age for spiritual perception (3000 BC to 1899 AD)

With the dusk of a spiritual Dark Age, initiation processes became increasingly important as the natural or instinctive abilities for spiritual perception faded in the process of human individualisation and a veiled threshold manifested between the ordinary and spiritual world. The crossing became more arduous and ancient Indian spiritual teachers foresaw an epoch of spiritual darkness – the Kali Yuga (Dark Age) – a time there the two worlds were almost solidly separated.

During this dark period initiation processes were followed to prepare individual initiates for super-sensible or spiritual perception. Initiates were prepared to cross the threshold and move through the veil, to reconnect with the spiritual world, to receive guidance from spiritual beings and to return with spiritual guidance. The trials were part of their training and gave evidence of their ability to move between the worlds or consciousnesses.

The Dark Age of spiritual perception ended with the year 1899 and new potentials of spiritual perception arise without humanity being consciously aware of the changing conditions. In meditation, ecstatic movement (dance), shock experiences, induced by drugs; or triggered by nature, divine or other *everyday* experiences, individuals cross the threshold or pass through the veil without noticing. Suddenly and totally unprepared they experience another reality as vividly as our ordinary sense-perceptible world without knowing what they have gotten into.

As the crossings appear more spontaneously so do the trials. Increasingly they appear as happenings in everyday life. The ordinary world, especially the social world becomes a 'Mystery Place' and initiation happens through life.

Trials and Thresholds in the context of this course

The starting point for our course will be to recognise crossings and trial experiences by reviewing our own biographies. In certain, perhaps difficult life circumstances we may have felt as if we are losing the ground from under our feet, being swept away by a wave, or feeling consumed by a fiery experience.

Those experiences will be widened towards recognising threshold experiences. These could happen as *being beside or above myself*. They could be frightening or joyous. Some have a deep and on-going influence and might appear as or contribute to physical, soul or mental disorders.

Trials and Thresholds and Mental Health

The American psychotherapist and theologian Caroline Myss introduced the term **Spiritual Madness** to describe a transition phenomenon which appears in conjunction the widening of human perception towards the super-sensible and spirit recognition. At the beginning of the 20th century the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner pointed out that the new perceptive potentials of mankind will trigger anxieties, fear, illusions and ultimately delusions if they are not made conscious, understood and integrated. He stated that the unnoticed or unconscious crossing of the threshold will be unsettling and cause individual and social problems.

Presenting phenomena – like hearing voices or seeing moving colours – may border on psychotic experiences and will be picked up in a following Course with the theme **Mental Health Crisis and Spiritual Emergency**.

In order to have a focus on the wide field of possibilities we will look at phenomena related to the Fire, Water and Air Trials in this course. We will further explore general spiritual experiences, their appearance and significance, with an attempt to find some ways of perceiving and understanding them.