



The Senses

by
Eileen M. Hutchins

We live as strangers in a world of light and color and sound. We behold around us many movements and forms, and yet we feel ourselves separate from them. And though within our own organism we have a realm which is more intimately ours, this too is a secret. For who can tell of the subtle changes which take place when he moves a hand or takes a step? Yet this inner world and the world around are made manifest to us through our senses, and if we would read their secrets, we need first to observe clearly that which is given. This is just where most of us fail, for we take so much for granted and we accept so much from the reports of others that we do not open our eyes and ears to that which is waiting to be revealed.

If we are willing to carefully consider the ways in which we can contact the world, we will find that our senses of perception are many more than the accepted five. Of the senses of smell, taste, color and sound we are well aware, even if we do not develop them very highly, for by means of them we connect ourselves with the world around, and their activity is accompanied by pleasure or pain. But let us consider for a moment how we are able to perceive our own organism. Many people, when questioned, reply, "We have a sense of feeling," but if the questioning is continued, the confusion becomes apparent, for feeling accompanies to a lesser or greater degree the functioning of all perceiving, and there is no special "feeling" sense. Yet in casual conversation we often speak more truly than we are aware. It is common to say, "I feel well" or "I feel ill," or after a good meal, "I have a sense of well-being." For we have a sense of our own condition, and this comes to a consciousness mostly when we are out of order or when, after illness, hunger or discomfort, we feel a renewing stream of life.

There is another way in which we are conscious of our life processes. When we are excited we feel our heart beat and our pulse throb, we feel stifled or our breath comes quickly. We are sensing the movement within our organism, and through this experience we are able also to relate ourselves to the movement of objects around us. But as we adjust ourselves in movement, another sense

becomes active: We need to retain our balance. We are most aware of this sense when we are dizzy, or when a great effort is needed to keep our position, as in the beginnings of skating or in difficult mountaineering. We are not conscious, however, of the wonderful power by which we keep our upright position and with every step overcome the force of gravity. We see that in the case of these senses connected with our life processes we are very dimly aware of their functioning and only become awake to their activity when they are disturbed.

If we were to group our senses together in a certain connected series, we could so far arrange them as follows:

- Senses directed to our own organism:
The senses of life or well-being, movement and balance
- Senses directed to the outer world:
The senses of smell, taste, sight and hearing

But it is necessary to consider for a moment the sense of touch, and this sense should perhaps be the very first of our series, for without it we could not experience ourselves in our surroundings at all. In a way it is the lowest and yet the highest sense, for the first dim feeling of the most primitive animals is a kind of touch, a sensing of their surroundings, while one of the noblest strivings of man is to be 'in touch' with his fellow men.

If we now pass on to consider the senses directed to the outer world, we realize that those of "smell" and "taste" serve more to give pleasure to the physical body, while sight and hearing serve much more as the foundation for thought. There is another sense which is often overlooked and which is in a certain way connected with that of sight. Whereas our sense of sight gives us the perception of light manifesting itself in color, we have also a sense by which we detect warmth; and it is not difficult to see that this is quite distinct from the touch sense.

We may now add to our series as follows:

- Senses directed chiefly to our own organism:
The senses of life or well-being, movement, balance and touch
- Senses directed chiefly to the outer world:
The senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing and warmth

At the beginning of this article we came to the realization that there are more senses than the commonly acknowledged five. We recognized a certain group of senses chiefly directed to our own organism, and another group which relates us to the world around. I would now like to pass over to certain other senses

which are little acknowledged as they are directed to a world which is no longer physically manifest, namely to the world of thought. In considering the senses directed to the outer world, we recognized that the senses of taste and smell are more experienced as giving physical pleasure, whereas those of sight and hearing give a basis for thinking.

Now we may take a step still further. For the average person a much stronger thought activity is needed to distinguish sound than to coordinate objects which appear before the eyes. If sounds are to take on a significance beyond the qualities of being loud or soft, harsh or melodious, thinking must become active. But together with this thinking moves also a further development of the perception. We perceive that sounds form a melody, or that words are spoken. Before we have weighed the meaning of the words, we perceive their utterance. Still further, we perceive whether the words express thought. Before we judge the thought to accept or reject it, we perceive that a thought is, as it were, offered for our consideration.

More than this, instead of observing objects in the outer world, we can perceive memories or thought images which we ourselves choose to contemplate. It is not for nothing that we use such phrases as "in my mind's eye." This inner perception is just as much an observing as is the case with external objects. We may, therefore, say that our sense of hearing leads over to a sense of speech and then to a sense of thought.

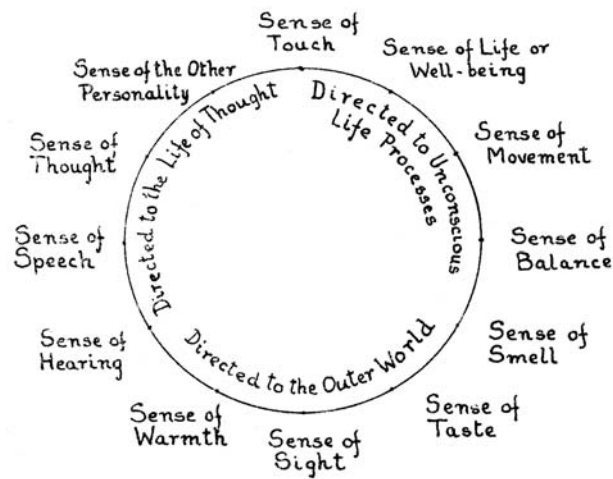
And now it is important to ask ourselves the question: "How do we perceive another human being?" We can, of course, see, touch and hear the person with whom we are present. But is this the highest extent of our perceiving? One hears of gypsies or hunters who can tell when another person is near even though they can see or hear nothing, for they sense the other person's presence. This type of sensing is not in the possession of the normal human being of today, but all who have had the experience of meeting someone and of feeling at once intimately connected know very well that we have a sense for perceiving the other human being which is more intimate than that of sight or sound.

To express this a little more clearly, here's an example. Perhaps we enter a room where there is a group of people, and we experience what is called a tense atmosphere, or perhaps on the other hand there is a friendly mood. No one, I think, will deny that this can be very vividly experienced, but on what does such an experience depend? It depends on the observing of very subtle relationships of human being with human being. It is possible to observe that when one human being enters a room immediately a restlessness is brought; another person may enter very quietly and there is a feeling of peace and tranquility. Our perceptions of such relationships are very little developed, and for the most part we do not try to cultivate that fine sensing of the personality of the other human being.

We might now in our series of the senses, arrange them as follows:

- Senses directed to our own organism:
The senses of life or well-being, movement, balance and touch
- Senses directed to the outer world:
The senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing and warmth
- Senses directed to the life of thought:
Senses of hearing, speech, thought, of the other personality

And now I would like to make the arrangement in the following way:



For here we may see how those senses connected with the bodily processes pass over to those directed to the outer world, and how these gradually become freer of the physical organism and lead to those directed to the thought life. And here once more we return to our sense of touch, but on a higher level. It is natural that we should speak of the instinctive feeling for what is pleasing to our fellow human beings as “tact,” for it is a kind of touch in a higher realm. If we develop those senses which belong more to our thinking life, tact may become conscious, and we may be truly in touch with that which is most noble in the human being, his ideal life.

The senses may be pictured as a magic circle, a crown of twelve jewels, in the light of which the secrets of the world may be revealed. We have been given all that is needed to solve the mysteries of life, but the activity and the struggle are ours.

Note:

This article came from Great Britain and was made into a pamphlet in 1975 by good friends Nathan and Yolanda Melniker who ran St. George Imprints. The clarity and value of the contents suggest that it come to the attention of contemporary readers.