
The Sense of Life from a Medical Doctor's Perspective

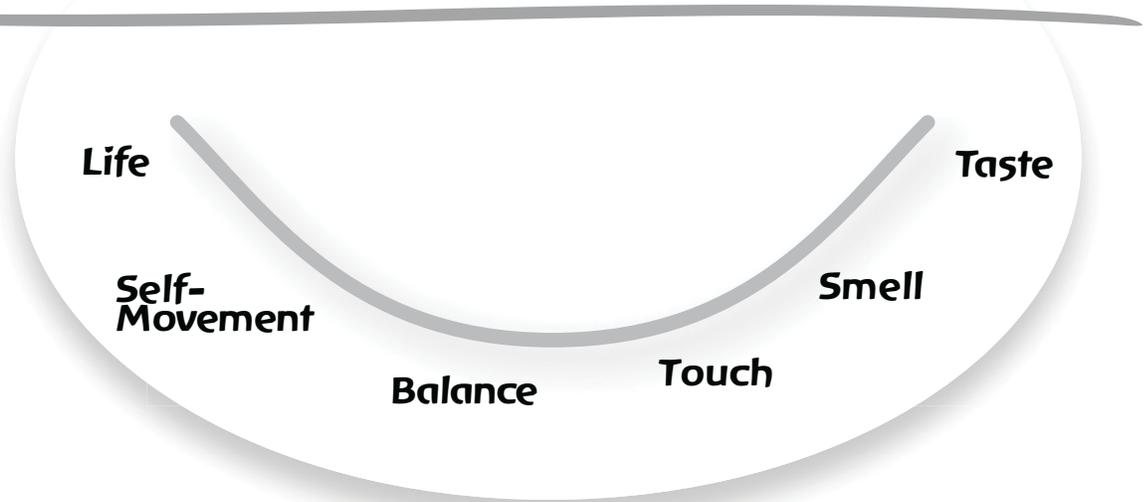
~ Dr. Adam Blanning

Dr. Adam Blanning is an anthroposophic family practice physician from Denver, CO. In addition to his private practice, he serves as school doctor and consultant to Colorado Waldorf schools. He is the president of AAMTA, a medical and therapeutic association for anthroposophic therapies; trains physicians in anthroposophical medicine; and is a frequent conference lecturer. He began his lectures with a companion—a “heavy baby” in arms—who showed the pathway through the lower senses to the security of the life sense.

Dr. Blanning began by stating that it is pretty easy to experience the disturbed life sense of another person if we see him sick. When the life sense is functioning well, we take it for granted. The feeling we can have after a good meal is an experience of

this healthy sense. When we are tired, we experience a diminution of the life sense. We can see the disturbed life sense in children who are uneasy and restless, who need a lot of attention and direction. These needs often come forth suddenly in transition

Dr. Blanning accompanied his discussion with a diagram drawn on the chalkboard derived from the recommended pre-conference lecture by Rudolf Steiner from August 8, 1920, titled "Spiritual Science as a Foundation for Social Forms."



times. Circle has ended. It is time for free play and there is a problem. A similar moment can happen when we are readying to put on snow clothes. One of these children always has an argument or meltdown. This is expression of an undeveloped life sense out of balance.

The life sense hovers in areas where we are not always aware—states of hunger, thirst, needing the bathroom. These are all aspects of the life sense. Children who have a disturbed life sense may have trouble connecting to these body states. They do not normally sense if they are hungry and then are suddenly starving and frantic. Or we may see a child who eats and eats without awareness of when “full” has been reached. These states show imbalance in the life sense, as do needing to go to the bathroom all the time or not feeling the need and waiting until it is too late. Hunger, thirst, need for going to the bathroom, and fatigue are all pathways to the life sense that tell us how we are feeling. When these working well, we feel well and complete. There is harmony in the inner world when all systems are functioning well. This is a healthy life sense.

(Discussion of these senses proceeds from right to left, beginning with TASTE and then descending in an arc through the other senses leading ultimately to LIFE.)

How do we get to the life sense by considering what we do with a newborn baby? If something is wrong or the baby distressed, the best response is to nurse. Nursing is related to taste. This is the best route for the newborn. The baby travels directly from taste to the life sense. This is built in. A newborn nurses and the world is good. She has a complete sense of wellbeing.

As the baby gets a little older, it can be helpful to have someone else hold the baby sometimes, like

the dad. The dad tries everything and then gives the baby back to mom. As soon as the child is in mom’s arms and can smell the mother’s milk, the baby calms. Immediately all is well.

What is the next stage if one doesn’t have milk and the right smell? We swaddle the baby, put a hat on her head, and hold her securely. As soon as her limbs come toward her body and the baby feels protected, she calms. Here we deal with touch.

When babies are older, swaddling doesn’t calm and satisfy any more. Then we put the baby up on the shoulder, pat, and move. The baby is being moved. This engages the sense of balance.

Then at a certain point we put the baby down and the baby moves herself and experiences self-movement.

This progression is important because all of us trace these steps on our own pathway into the world. If we observe how we care for a baby, we can see this progression ourselves by beginning with taste. This ordering is different from Rudolf Steiner’s other lectures where touch was the innermost sense. Steiner says that with touch we actually feel ourselves. If I grip something hard or something soft, I am sensing how my hand changes. The object I am touching does not change; the change occurs within myself. Taste is an outward sense. Smell is more inward. Touch in this lecture’s context is even further inward and is a step toward the life sense, which is how I feel myself in myself.

Children struggling with the life sense will go to one of the other senses as a beginning point. Every time we try to go to sleep or to self-soothe, we go through this pathway of the senses. Before sleep, we often move, twitch, snuggle down, and touch. We do this as a pathway to the life sense. Going to sleep is a great opportunity to practice traveling this inward

pathway. We also travel this same path when we wake up and need to settle back to sleep. When a child with a healthy life sense is in this spot, he has an anchor in being able to autonomously get to the life sense himself. Other children who do not have this anchor go to another sensory spot on the pathway to reach the security provided by the life sense. We do this not only in sleep but in social situations, such as circle time. The life-sense-insecure child will bump into someone else and move in big ways to engage self-movement. These can be the children who destroy circle time at the reverential moment. “They should get a better life sense! The parents should get

them a better life sense, pronto!” we might wish we could say.

Or we can understand that such children at this moment have lost their moorings and don’t know where to go. We live in a world that has wandered away from this inner path, which has to develop in the first seven years. If it doesn’t happen before the change of teeth, developing this pathway becomes a therapeutic activity later on. We can be so bombarded by the world that the life sense never actually develops. Coming to this realization is a first step in beginning to support the child in growing a healthy life sense. ◆
