

# Developing empathy

## Opinion

Developing empathy, or experiential insight into the feelings and needs of other individuals, is the key to developing related altruistic qualities such as, genuine caring, compassion, sympathy, generosity, patience, and tolerance for diversity. The existence of empathy, involving the ability to tune into the feelings and other experiential states of another person, implies that our consciousness can extend itself, like a bridge or underground root, to abide in the consciousness and subconscious or subliminal experience of another individual, because our consciousness and heartfelt caring feeling energy are naturally related to others, not intrinsically totally separate and disconnected from others. We can extend our experiential self into other individuals, in empathic communion with them, because we are naturally related and connected to others, as implied by the etymological derivation of the English word empathy from the German word *Einfühlung*, “literally, a feeling in” [see <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/empathy> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>]. According to Ken Wilber, “...both modern science and Eastern philosophy view reality not as boundaries and separate things, but as a non-dual network of inseparable patterns, a giant atom, a seamless coat of no-boundary.” [Ken Wilber, *No Boundary* (Boston and London: New Science Library, and Shambala, 1981), page 40, compare Lynn McTaggart, *The Bond: Connecting to the Space Between Us* (New York: Free Press, a division of Simon and Schuster Inc., 2011)]. Similarly, another influential psychologist, Abraham Maslow, describes psychologically healthy and fulfilling “peak experiences” or “Being experiences” as transcending dichotomies and involving an enhanced awareness of “interconnectedness.” [Abraham Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Second Edition. (USA: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company Inc., 1968), page 83].

Developing empathy is possible only if we are willing to at least temporarily or occasionally let go of separate egocentric self-awareness, and the incessant mind chatter and narcissistic emotional dramas that that involves, so that we are not distracted from non-dualistically tuning into the experiential states and living energy presence of another person, with deeply invested heartfelt caring feeling as well as with our undivided fully invested conscious attention. At a mostly subconscious or subliminal level of the psyche, the ego fears that it will be permanently forgotten and thereby lost as our separate sense of individual self-awareness if we invest deeply, fully in empathic communion with another individual, reserving no conscious attention and heartfelt feeling energy for separate self-awareness and self-seeking motives. However, the truth is that if we are willing to occasionally let go of separate self-awareness by deeply investing our conscious attention and heartfelt feeling energies in another person, individual self-awareness will naturally, spontaneously return later, at more appropriate times, without any conscious volitional control or predetermined effort being required to make that happen, because our real individuality is inherently a relational yet relatively differentiated individuality, whereas the ego as a sense of psychologically disconnected, exclusively separated, individuality is a false sense of self, which provides us with false, distorted self-knowledge and unrealistic self-enhancement.

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Furthermore, another related reason why letting go of the ego's separate self-preoccupation in empathic communion with others ultimately leads to greater discovery and development of what is truly genuine, vital, and productively creative in ourselves, rather than leading to the permanent loss of individual self-understanding and self-development, is that the individual and relational aspects of our being are both abiding on the same indivisible whole continuum of life energy, and are naturally mutually enhancing rather than mutually exclusive. Therefore, the experiential insights that we gain about other individuals by empathically communing with them, and unselfishly contributing to their greater fulfillment, naturally arouse related aspects of ourselves.

Thus, the ego's sense of separate self-awareness is only temporarily suspended, not permanently lost, in empathic communion with other individuals, later it comes back with truer, clearer, deeper, and healthier self-understanding, and enhanced productive functioning or greater self-development, than before, as we indirectly arouse our own dormant potentials by responsively eliciting the related potentials of others. The reason why, at least in some cases, our own individual potentials are best aroused through empathic communion and unselfish service to others is that to a significant extent at least some of our potentials are naturally relational to others.

## Developing empathy as a key to creative transformation

The greater, deeper, or stronger our degree of investment in self-forgetful, heartfelt, caring, empathic communion with other individuals, the correspondingly more deeply we will be able to penetrate beyond the surface or mundane aspects of their energy and experience to the sublime core of their being or life energy presence. That deeper level of developing empathy or experiential communion arouses and amplifies sublime noetic qualities such as creative insight, inspiration, vitality, and true beauty in one another and ourselves, through a process of “electromagnetic” vibratory resonance. Arousing that good energy through developing empathy also ripples outward to

change the wider world for the better. That is to say, individuals who deeply connect in empathic communion with one another become like “magnets” to amplify qualities and talents of true greatness and beneficial transformation in one another, or serve as compatible “keys” to unlock one another’s hidden inner treasures, so to speak.

Empathic communion not only produces a greater understanding of what we are already currently being, but also illuminates and arouses the further development of what we are naturally meant to become. That is to say, the relational energy of warmhearted caring and empathic communion stirs, or “magnetically” energizes, every level of our real being, including our spiritual core, or power-center, to unfold, manifest, and further develop potentials that were previously latent or dormant within itself. That is how we fulfill our true intended destiny, or our seed-like spiritual blueprint, individually, relationally, and collectively.

Developing empathy improves interpersonal relationships by enabling us to understand others more accurately and deeply, and to respond more appropriately and compassionately to their legitimate needs, which contributes to better interpersonal communication, experiential close connection, and genuine caring or true love. Empathic communion with the experiential states of another individual not only brings better understanding of explicit verbal communications, but also enables us to “read between the lines” by discerning aspects of meaning and intention that may be only implied but not explicitly stated, and it can also serve as the basis of entirely non-verbal modes of communication, where messages are conveyed without words, which can involve subtle bodily gestures, or even direct transmission of energy-experience without even being mediated by such subtle gestures.

Furthermore, developing empathy also contributes to improving society by enabling individuals and groups to not be exclusively locked into their own viewpoints, but instead develop more understanding, compassion, openness, nonjudgmental acceptance,

tolerance, and respect for people whose persuasions or ethnic/social backgrounds differ from their own. Various kinds of bigotry, intolerance, callousness, social injustice, and oppression are most essentially rooted in lack of empathy, involving lack of openness to the intrinsic value or inherent preciousness of every living being, and a related lack of openness to finding aspects of truth and value in views with which we disagree. Conversely, developing empathy, by letting go of the ego’s sense of prideful superiority and self-enclosed insensitivity to the experience, feelings, views, and needs of others, enables us to intuitively recognize the inherent value, preciousness, and inner beauty of others, regardless of how they may differ from us, and makes us more open to learning from the relative truth and value of their views even when that calls into question our own views. That is why developing empathy is the key to constructive conflict resolution, good-will, and mutually beneficial productive cooperation in dyadic relationships, as well as within and between particular groups, local communities, and global society as a whole.

The process of developing empathy, and other related subliminal noetic capabilities such as, intuition, integrity, creativity, true caring or caring warmth, and appreciation of true inner and outer beauty, is discussed in greater depth and detail in two new books co-authored by Dr. Max Hammer, Dr. Barry Hammer, and Dr. Alan C. Butler: 1. *Deepening Your Personal Relationships: Developing Emotional Intimacy and Good Communication* (ISBN: 9781618975904); 2. *Psychological Healing Through Creative Self-Understanding and Self-Transformation*(ISBN: 9781628570755).

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.