

A PSYCHOLOGY OF FREEDOM - THE FOUR LEVELS OF EMPATHIC PERCEPTIONS:

The Intellectual, the Imaginative, the Inspirative and the Intuitive levels of empathic perception

A recent development in the evolution of empathy (a chapter of a book in writing)

By Yehuda Tagar

Empathy is a growing field of research, development and training. The term has been used since 1951, but the appreciation for its importance keeps growing as the cutting edge of conscious human evolution. Methodical Empathy, the process by which an individual's capacity for empathy can grow methodically – is Psychophonetics most important cultural contribution in its 35 years of existence. Empathy is so new in human cultural evolution – we can teach it and learn it like any other skill, as demonstrated through Psychophonetics practice and professional training.

I have been teaching Methodical Empathy for the past 20 years in 10 countries, but only lately, in April 2020, in the middle of the isolation imposed by the coronavirus pandemic lock-down, in the heart of Europe - I had a breakthrough in my evolving understanding of empathy. In 2000 I created, at my Australian students request, the basic methodology of '*Methodical Empathy*'. It has evolved greatly during these two decades of practice and teaching. It became a complete international curriculum for the training of holistic counsellors and of Psychophonetics. I thought the foundation was broad enough for further developments for the rest of my life.

And yet there was more to discover.

For the past 20 years I was teaching my students of coaching, counselling, psychotherapy and consultancy the Psychophonetics '*Parallel Processing*' as the core process of Methodical Empathy> The principal was right from the start: through deepening empathy with oneself – the organ for the empathic perception of others is growing. The format for this on-going development for practitioners was outlined in the following way:

Starting point A) - when you feel stuck in the counselling process and you need to move on:

1. Acknowledge where you are in yourself;
2. Sense your inner experience;
3. Gesture it to yourself (invisibly to the outside);
4. visualise your own gesture;
5. Name your inner situation for yourself.

Starting point B) – the next stage from the previous starting point and also whenever you want to go deeper in your empathic perception of you client:

1. Creating a fresh picture of the client's experience;
2. Putting oneself inside of this picture;
3. Feeling it fully as if this is your life;
4. Gesturing it inwardly;
5. Naming it – translate it into words: that is the Deep Empathic Response (DER)

This formula worked wonderfully for years, growing ever deeper in students' and practitioners' development of empathy. It worked. It could go on developing for years to come.

But then I woke up to another level of this process. It happened in the strangest of ways: I was studying a documentary about the intricate relationship between Hitler and Stalin, the game of cat & mouse they were playing between the signing of the Ribbentrop- Molotov non-aggression in August 1939 and the 'Barbarossa' surprise attack of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Stalin believed it would come a year later and was totally caught by surprise with catastrophic results. He *put himself in Hitler's head* and used 'Stalin's logic': methodical, step by step, considering all consequences, taking only calculated risks, attacking only when your back is protected. He stuck with his opinion in spite of dozens of reports from Soviet spies and British intelligence predicting an imminent invasion, in spite of 3,000,000 German soldiers and thousands of tanks aggregating on the border. Hitler is not stupid" he said. "he will not open a second front". But that is not how Hitler operated: he was a notorious risk taker, a visionary, idealist, believing in the destiny of himself as the messiah of the German nation. He did what Stalin would never do, what Bismarck would never do, what the high command of the Wehrmacht would never do: starting a war on two fronts. Against all odds Hitler did just that. Later, when the disaster had already happened, he allegedly told his close circle: "**when you put yourself in someone else's head – you are bound to make mistakes**". What an insightful, accurate statement. For most people to be able to put themselves in someone else's mind, body, position, situation – would be a great achievement, but for an accomplished act of empathy putting yourself in someone else's mind is just not good enough.

Because *yourself* is the wrong person to be put in the other's position, using *your logic*. For a complete act of empathic understanding of another person you have to put *that other person's self* in their own position and to use *their kind of logic*. Stalin failed to do it. He put himself in Hitler's position - but he was *not* Hitler. The result was catastrophic for the Soviet Union and the war: the conquest up to the gates of Moscow, close to 5,000,000 military casualties in 1941 alone, 8,800,000 in the whole war, and 13,000,000 civilians, including 5,000,000 East European Jews. It was the most costly failure of empathy in human history.

Conclusion: to perceive the reality of another person you have to put *him/herself* inside of their situation, *not yourself*. But how to do that? What kind of empathy is required to perceive *the actual meaning of the other*, not only *the experience* of the other?

A transition is required here from Perceptive Imagination, through Perceptive Inspiration to perceptive Intuition. Let me explain the terms.

The normal senses that we all have are all designed to observe the outer world. Some count 5 normal senses, some count 12, but all of them are windows into the physical exterior of reality. If we count on the normal 5 senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste, and we add to them the senses of warmth, balance, movement, the sense of the state of wellbeing in the body, the sense of the intonation in someone's speech, the sense of the thoughts in someone's expression and the sense of the presence of another person's 'I' – we have 12 normal senses for orientation in our physical environment. Not one normal sense is designed to perceive the inner reality of things and of people: their underlying energy dynamics, their sensual-emotional experience, their individual meaning.

In conventional interaction listening to you means that I perceive impressions reaching me from you through my normal senses, creating mental pictures of what I perceive, mostly associative, and giving these impressions my own meaning. That is a *Pre-Empathic, projective perception of another person's reality*. Some call it 'Naïve Realism'. Let us call it here: **Empathy level 1**.

But if we want to perceive the dynamics underlying the surface of reality, the formative forces that result in the appearance of things – we need another sense on top of the 12 mentioned already to perceive not only the grown tree – but the process of the tree growing; not only the physical body – but the life forces that make it alive; not only a group of people in a circle – but the energy of the meeting; This deeper perception requires sensing of a deeper kind. For this I have to create a living picture of the inner situation of the other, and if I do it right – I may succeed in understanding the

deeper reality in the phenomena or person in front of me. This level of perception we call in Psychosophy *Inner Seeing*, *Perceptive Imagination* or *Imaginative Perception*. This may be called **Empathy level 2**.

But if we want to go further into the *experiential reality* of the subjective being, the person that I observe – then another sense is required. In order to perceive your feeling, sensation, pain, pleasure, desire, joy and sadness from your own position – I need to let your experience resonate inside of my experience. I have to let your being live in me. This level of perception we call *Inner Hearing* or *Perceptive Inspiration*. In light of the Latin origin of inspiration: *In-spiritum*, the word inspiration here means ‘The being of another is resonating inside me’. This is **Empathy level 3**.

But another level of empathy is required in order to perceive not only the *experience* of the other person, but the *meaning* that the other person gives to his/her experience. Both Imagination and Inspiration are still impressions reaching the observer from the *outside*. In order to perceive the meaning of the other person – a perception from the *inside* of the other is required. All *tutions* indicate learning from the outside, but *In-tuition* indicates learning about someone from his/her *own inside*. *Perceptive Intuition* is the term given in Applied Psychosophy to this act of knowing. No longer do I perceive you through the impressions I have of you but through my intuitive perception of your meaning. I intuit *your meaning*, not *my meaning* by finding your reality inside of me: *In-Tuition*. This is **Empathy level 4**.

The **Parallel Processing**, the core process of Methodical Empathy which I described before engages *all* four levels of empathy, but methodically it leaves the process on level 3: – I create an Imaginative picture of that person’s inner dynamics, then I put *myself* inside of that picture – and feel it from the inside. The insight emerging from this act, put into words – becomes my Deep Empathic Response (DER) to the other person.

But there is a limitation in this process: in putting myself inside another person’s situation – it is still *ME* that I am putting into the other’s position and experience. That would mean that it is *My Meaning* which I will attribute to the experience of the other, not *their meaning*. *But the other person is NOT me!* Had it been possible to put into that imaginative picture *the meaning it has for the other*, not *of myself* – surely that would be a much more accurate level of perception of the other. In order to do it three conscious acts are required: 1) to empty the imaginative picture that I created from *my experiential resonance* of it; 2) to activate within myself *intuitively* an inner connection to the other person and to the meaning which the other person is giving to his/her experience, and 3) to place *that* meaning inside of the imaginative picture which I have created.

If I would manage to do that -and IF is a big word here – I have achieved level 4 of empathy: Intuitive Empathy.

But in that case - what is the role of the *Perceptive Inspiration* I created on Empathy level 3? What is left of it one obliterated? The answer to that question is that as a result of the creation of the first 3 levels of empathy – I have changed, I have been upgraded, I became a much clearer instrument of perception: in creating the inner resonance of the other’s experience inside me – I have raised my own consciousness to a higher level than before; by that act of deep empathy (level 3) my empathic capacity has developed to the next level: Perceptive Intuition. The act of *Perceptive Inspiration* prepared me as an ‘Inner Tuning’ for the act of *Perceptive Intuition*. I myself, all of me, become an instrument of perception for the *being of the other*, and through this tuned instrument which I have become - I can hope to perceive the *meaning* of the other from their inside, not only their experience.

In practical terms what the process would look like is this:

Starting point A) – activated when you feel stuck in the counselling process and you need to move on from that:

1. Acknowledge where you are in yourself;
2. Sense your inner experience;
3. Gesture it to yourself (invisibly to the outside);
4. Behold/visualise the gesture;
5. Name your inner situation.

Starting point B) – the next stage from the previous starting point and also whenever you want to go deeper in your empathic perception of you client:

1. Creating a fresh picture of the client's experience;
2. Putting oneself inside of this picture;
3. Feeling it fully as if this is your life;
4. Gesturing it inwardly;
5. Naming it – translate it into words: that is the Deep Empathic Response (DER).

I can choose to give the other person that Deep Empathic Response, or I can choose to hold it back and create the next response:

Starting point C) – moving from empathy with the *experience* of the other into empathy with the *meaning* of the other:

1. Emptying my own experience from the imaginative picture
2. Activating in myself the sense of the 'I' of the other person (eye contact is essential here);
3. Creating an overall impression of the being of the other person, while he/she is looking at me through their own eyes. Sensing the other in my whole body;
4. Putting *them* in the middle of my picture of their own experience;
5. ***Naming my perception of their meaning of their own experience: that would be the Intuitive Empathic Response.***

I hope that makes sense to you. The real understanding of it will come when you are actually trying to do it in your honest striving to understand another person from their inside. It works for me.

Here I wish to acknowledge and give credit to what helped me to come to this insight: For forty years I have been contemplating, experimenting and applying a statement given in the last chapter of the foundation book of Rudolf Steiner's epistemology (theory of knowledge): 'The Philosophy of Freedom' (1894), on which my life work is based. In this philosophical breakthrough Steiner establishes the premise that what we call reality is an individual creation, synthesising *individual perception* and *individual conception* in the free act of thinking. And yet this individual creation can, potentially, attain a true knowledge of objective reality in the world. This I call 'Radical Phenomenology'. In this thesis, the foundation of Rudolf Steiner's Monism, he refutes the old Kantian assumption that real knowledge of the world, knowledge of 'The Thing in Itself' – cannot be attained by human cognition. Rudolf Steiner, one of the latest representatives of *German Idealism* (which should now be called 'Central European Idealism') claims that *real knowledge IS attainable by human thinking*, because human perceptive capacity *in itself* can evolve further. He further claimed that on the basis of true knowledge of oneself and the world – free action is possible. This is, in a nutshell, The Philosophy of Freedom. The rest of his Anthroposophy (which is not necessarily the same as the anthroposophical tradition that continued after him) consists of outlining the educational/development process by which such a deeper perception of oneself and the world can methodically evolve, and the rich results of his 'Spiritual Scientific Research' *** that is based on that extra perceptive capacity. Steiner claimed that it is in everyone's potential to develop such a

perceptive capacity. Psychophonetics is an application of this development into Methodical Empathy, holistic coaching, counselling and psychotherapy.

The name of chapter 14th, the last one of 'The Philosophy of Freedom' is: '*Individuality and Genius*'. There the author establishes philosophically that the core element of a human being, over and above what makes him/her a member of a collective – is his/her unique, un-predictable, un-programmed individuality. It is therefore for the individual to determine the meaning of his/her own experience, not for anyone else outside him/her.

It took me 40 years of research, development, application, clinical and education work in eighteen countries to come to this understanding in action of the deeper meaning of that statement, which says:

"Whenever we feel that we are dealing with that element in a human being which is free from stereotyped thinking and instinctive willing, then, if we would understand him/her in his/her essence, we must cease to call to our aid any concepts at all of our own making.

*The act of knowing consists in combining the concept with the percept by means of thinking. With all other objects the observer must get his concepts through his/her intuition; **but if we are to understand a free individuality we must take over into our own spirit those concepts by which he/she determines himself/herself, in their pure form, without mixing our own conceptual content with them**".*

Rudolf Steiner, 1894, The Philosophy of Freedom, chapter 14: Individuality and Genius.

This is the 4th level of empathic perception as I define it today. It requires the activation of *all* the previous three levels of empathic perception to reach it, like steps in a ladder. But reach it we must if we are to reach a true perception of the reality of another human being, the way this reality is being experienced and known to that other human being.

Josef Stalin made a fatal mistake by putting himself in the mind of Adolf Hitler at a crucial moment in human history. It resulted in catastrophic consequences and rivers of blood for the whole of Eastern Europe and the world. We don't have to continue repeating such a mistake forever.

It took me 20 years to develop the practical understanding of the first three levels of empathic perception, with the help of experimental, initiatory Drama. It took me further 20 years of international cultivation of this realisation into the practicality of 'Method Empathy' on the first 3 levels both therapeutically and educationally. All that leads me now to the understanding of the unique nature of the 4th level of empathy: ***Intuitive Empathy***. I am looking forward to the next 20 years of myself and my colleagues in Psychophonetics in 10 countries to build on this foundation and to make a significant cultural contribution towards the future civilization of complete empathy that is coming.

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