

Understanding Empathy With Reference To Rumi

Farah Iqbal¹, Ghazal Khawaja², M. Khalid Rahman³

¹Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Karachi,

²Assistant Professor of Public Administration, University of Karachi,

³Jinnah University for Women, Karachi,

PAKISTAN.

ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to understand what basic role empathy can play for humankind to make it dwell in synchronization with special reference to Rumi's philosophy of life. Empathy is the capability to appreciate, understand, and accept another person's emotions. Showing empathy genuinely is one of the most important interpersonal skills that anyone can master. American psychologist Marshall Rosenberg calls empathy "a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing" whereas American literacy expert Palm Allyn says that every child has the capacity for empathy—for understanding and respecting the emotions and perspectives of others.

Keywords: Empathy, Inspirational, Iran, Persian-poetry, Rumi, Rumi poetry

INTRODUCTION

Learning to live together involves understanding others to establish quality relationships at all levels – family, friends, communal, societal, national or international. It is a dynamic, holistic and lifelong process that is achieved through social responsibility, acceptance and tolerance of diversity among individuals and groups (ethnic, social, cultural, religious, national or even beyond any boundaries). This process is internalized and practiced to effect problem-solving and working towards a society where people live with mutual respect and acceptance. The process begins with the development of inner peace in the minds and hearts of individuals engaged in the search for truth, knowledge and understanding of each other's perspective and the appreciation of shared common values to achieve synchronization and thus a better future.

A quote from sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273) can be rightly placed here: "Speak a new language, so that the world will be a new world."

When Rumi has been quoted, it is right to highlight his multiplicity as a great poet, jurist, theologian and Sufi mystic. Rumi transcends national and ethnic borders. His Masnavi is a Sufi masterpiece. The six books of the Masnavi can be divided into three groups of two because each pair is linked by a common theme. Books 1 and 2 are principally concerned with the understanding Self (thus psychology). Two of his six books—3 and 4—deal with reason and knowledge. This paper is based on his Sufic thoughts and philosophy.

"Getting to know each other better" is to achieve empathy and synchronization. It has never been more important and compelling as now because people experience unprecedented rapid change in their economic, political, social and cultural lives, and thus the need for empathy has increased. Such is the diversity and contrast that some of the countries experience traumatic events including war, revolution and internal conflict characterized by racial, ethnic and cultural conflicts thus experienced not much stability.

As Rumi says, treasure is stored in the ruined places. Hence, human beings should not "break the hearts of the poor and of the heartbroken people."

Social and economic changes are affecting family structures and the roles of individuals within the family. These changes are having inevitable effects on the role of families as the agents of primary socialization. Thus *empathy* can be promoted through tolerance in order to enable individuals to give and receive; to create an awareness of humankind irrespective of race, religion, creed and culture; to create awareness of the uniqueness of individuals to enhance the quality of human relationships through a sense of dignity and equality, mutual trust, and an appreciation of others' beliefs and cultures; to promote active participation in all aspects of social life, and to ensure freedom of expression, belief and worship; to create awareness of the need for individual freedom and autonomy with responsibility; to develop the skills of reasoning. It refers to understanding others' experiences from within their frame of reference (Bellet & Maloney, 1991). Another definition of empathy says it is a mechanism through which we bridge the gap between experience and thought (Szalita, 1976). How well this thought has been summarized by Rumi in his verse:

“If you can straighten out
your own beastly self
you have the right
to claim Solomon's kingdom.

If you can finally hunt down
yourself from your selfish self
yourself from your selfish self
all heavenly spirits
will stand ready to serve you.” (Rumi)

“When you do things from your soul,
you feel a river moving within you, a joy” (Rumi)

“Wherever you are,
and whatever you do,
stay in love! (Rumi)

MEANING OF EMPATHY

Empathy, literally “in-feeling,” is the capability to appreciate, understand, and accept another person's emotions. Showing empathy genuinely is one of the most important interpersonal skills that one can master.

Marshall Rosenberg, recipient of the Global Village Foundation's Bridge of Peace Award in 2006 and traveled almost all over the world helping others resolve conflicts; the founder and director of educational services for the Center for Nonviolent Communication, states “*Empathy* is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing.” He emphasizes that “instead of offering *empathy*, we often have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling,” adding: “*Empathy*, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being.”

As Rumi said,

“One preoccupied with pointing out what's wrong,
Misses the unseen. Look at his face!”

In his work *Culture of Empathy Builder*, Rosenberg says, “No matter what words others may use to express themselves, we simply listen for their observations, feelings, needs, and requests. Then we may wish to reflect back, paraphrasing what we have understood, allowing others the opportunity to fully express themselves before we turn our attention to solutions or requests for relief.”

Rumi expresses this in these words, “Speak a new language, so that the world will be a new world.”

Empathy is about knowing that everyone in the world has a story. It is about being fully present with another’s experience and not thinking about how we can get what we want. It is what they may be feeling and deeply longing for, or needing. When we connect with that, we get connected with the Divine energy as we are sum of a whole. Kashtan, in a workshop on how to influence your community, asserted that listening is the most vital way through which we can make a difference in our community (Zacapa, 2011). This is how peace begins.

Pam Allyn (2013) emphasized that family and educators can help a child learn empathy through reading. This not only brings harmony and peace in child, but is also conducive to a peaceful society. The reasons Allyn has given are: (i) It allows children to conceptualize a world even beyond of their “self”; (ii) It makes way for multiple perspectives; (iii) It improves listening skills; and (iv) It makes the child aware of choices available thus he can live a meaningful life (Allyn, 2013).

We find similar thinking in Rumi’s verses:

Lose yourself

Escape from the black cloud that surrounds you

Then you will see your own light

As radiant as the full moon. (Rumi)

AMALGAMATION OF PEACE, HARMONY AND EMPATHY:

According to the findings of a UNESCO project (1998), learning to live together in peace and harmony has never been more important and compelling in terms of both national and global considerations with many of these people experiencing exceptionally rapid change in their economic, political, cultural and social lives.

Israeli director-producer Ido Sela, in his enthralling 1993 documentary ‘Testimonies’, interviewed Israeli soldiers to understand the dilemma of prolonged physical torture or killing of Palestinians during the first Intifada. They explained that despite a sense of distress while inflicting harm on Palestinians, they continued to do it. The most familiar reasons that permitted them to ignore their empathic responses were fear of consequences. Considering this, they continued doing what they were told to do, believing that it was the right thing to do. He added that only one person stopped torturing when some Palestinian children reminded of his own daughter (Sela, 1993).

Another interesting read, *On Killing*, by David Grossman, a US Army officer, studied comprehensively what makes people overcome the natural distaste to killing which was discovered after World War I. In his writings, he established that US Army training focused on reducing access to empathetic behaviour by numbing and desensitizing trainees, which increased the shooting rate from 10-20% in previous wars to 80% and 90% in later wars. His work holds tidal warnings that the cost is unparalleled trauma to war veterans and the nation that sent them to war (Grossman, 1995).

In 2007, the *Time* magazine selected Frans de Waal as one of the world's most influential people, a biologist, professor of psychology and the director of the Living Link Center at Emory University. De Waal, in his book, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*, explains *empathy* as a social glue that holds human society together. For him, "Empathy is an automated response over which we have limited control." He points that many survive through collaboration (De Waal, 2010)

Douglas LaBier(2010) proposed Empathy Deficit Disorder (EDD) under which one gets under the delusion that they are completely independent and self-sufficient and lose touch with the realism. They disregard that all humans are interconnected and inter-reliant as organs of the same body. This pragmatism is extremely essential for survival in today's world which ironically fading away. According to LaBier, it sound like science fiction, yet we can learn to "reprogram" our brain and can learn to grow empathy and overcome EDD.

As the work progressed, Ugo Uche (2010) tried to explore whether there is any connection between empathy and depression or not. He identified that a person who holds back his/her feelings cannot adequately carry out the feelings of empathy even though may have an intellectual understanding of what empathy is, and what it takes to be empathetic. On the other hand, people with depressive symptoms usually feel that their feelings are already dead inside themselves. Depression never has a sudden onset. It is a process that begins with a disagreement to concede to the painful and complicated feelings, which is entirely possible in case of empathy as a factor associated with depression. He proposes that a psychologically healthy level of empathy is necessary to maintain psychological health.

Uche recommends a guideline for parents to help their children stay consistently in touch with their feelings and model how to cope with displeasures. Parents are supposed to be cognizant of creating an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance of self and others. According to Uche, this approach pays off in the long run as the youths who are more proficient at dealing with displeasures, are more likely to be happier, achieve success in their endeavors, as they know the intricacies of human feelings.

Understanding others is a holistic and enduring process through which evokes reciprocal respect non-judgmental, caring and sharing, consideration, social responsibility, harmony, acceptance and open-mindedness for diversity among individuals and groups (ethnic, social, cultural, religious, national and global).

As Rumi asks:

"You were born with wings.

Why prefer to crawl through life?"

CORE RUDIMENTS TO DEVELOP "EMPATHY" COMRISE:

Love - (self-worth/self-esteem ,trust and respect ,positive self-criticism ,openness, deep sense of responsibility, concern for others, loyalty sense of sacrifice, sense of reconciliation ,courage, gentleness, endurance, confidence in the human spirit, genuineness.)

Harmony - (mutual trust and understanding ,sense of belonging/cultural worth cooperation/ collaboration, effective communication ,concern for common ,good sense of reconciliation, desire for consensus, freedom and responsibility, equality, cooperation, integrity). Researches indicate that empathy inculcates enhanced communication which facilitates improved health outcomes (Stewart, 1995), improved compliance on the part of the patient (Beckman et al., 1994) and better satisfaction of patient and workers (Suchman et al., 1993; Brody et al., 1989)

Tolerance - (acceptance/appreciation of diversity, mutual respect, genuine acceptance and accommodation, respect for personal and cultural differences-unity in diversity, preparedness to work with others, peaceful, conflict resolution, courtesy/cordiality, open-mindedness.)

The world comprises a series of nation states. Many of them have experienced traumatic events such as war, revolution and internal conflict, and have also experienced periods of great stability. It contains a diversity of the world's major belief systems – both religious and secular – which continue to endure despite challenges to traditional beliefs as a consequence of modernization. & is characterized by racial, ethnic and cultural pluralism, both within the boundaries of the individual nation states, but also; across the global world.

This pluralism is accommodated in various ways in the different nation states. An enhanced sense of identity as a Global World due to expanded electronic, print and physical contact, and economic links, thus confronted with circumstances where economic expansion and modernization have been accompanied by an increasing focus on the values of materialism and consumerism, which have the potential to destabilize social and ecological sustainability. This is disturbing family structures and the roles and occupational pursuits of individuals within the family. These changes are having inevitable effects on the responsibility of families as the agents of primary socialization.

How proficiently Rumi has highlighted,

“Treasure is stored in the ruined places. Competently

Do not break the hearts of the poor and heartbroken people.”

Types of Empathy

There are three important types of *empathy* as suggested by a known psychologist Mark Davis (Riggio, 2011).

The first is a purely “cognitive” form of *empathy* that he terms “perspective taking,” which means being able to see things from another’s point of view or putting yourself in someone else’s shoes.

A second type of empathy is “personal distress.” Personal distress is literally feeling another’s emotions. When you are watching a scary movie, and you start to empathize with its characters and feel scared, that is personal distress in action. You are actually feeling other person’s emotion through a process called “emotional contagion.” The actor, or another person, is actually “infecting” you with their emotion. We all experience personal distress, but too much of it may not be a good thing. Some people are so prone to feeling other’s emotional states that they are battered about by the feelings and emotions of others (thus the label of “distress”).

The third type of *empathy*: “Empathic Concern”. This type is what we most often think about when we hear the term “*empathy*”. It is the ability to recognize another's emotional state and show appropriate concern.

Ronald E. Riggio 2011, conducted a study with hospice nurses caring for terminally-ill patients found that nurses *empathic* concern was positively related to their performance, but personal distress was negatively related, thus it made them less able to do their job of providing comfort to the patient because they had their own emotions to deal with.

In realism we all have at least some level of each of type of empathy. The key is to comprehend the ways that we are empathetic with others, and to recognize the strengths and limitations of each type.

Stages of Empathy

Saberi Roy (2010) identified the stages of empathy as: (i) *Intuition* – natural insight towards other person's emotions and feelings or thought processes. (ii) *Connection* between two people leads to (iii) *Mutual Consideration* (iv) which helps in *Prediction* (v) and thus *Motivate* others for a bond.

She adds that from a psychological point of view, empathy would involve love and belongingness needs as identified by Maslow's *Need Hierarchy*. Additionally, Roy thinks that this may help in any client centered therapy which entails empathetic connection between the client and the therapist, as well as the development of an Affective Therapeutic System based on the Intuition – Connection – Consideration – Prediction – Motivation (ICCPM) model of *empathy*.

Researches indicate that when repetitive opportunities of empathy are missed, the sessions get more elongated and frustrating for both the client and psychologist/psychiatrist hereby consuming extra time, cost and efforts (Suchman et al., 1997; Levinson et al., 2000).

Changing Our World with Empathy

“Cultivate a sense of *empathy* – to put yourself in other people's shoes – to see the world from their eyes. *Empathy* is a quality of character that can change the world.” - Barack Obama

As Allyn (2013) states, understanding the others which in other words means *empathy* can be achieved through ‘educating’ the people. The family and educator's work in helping a child build empathy to others cannot be underestimated as key to not only that child's outcomes, but the outcomes of a peaceful society overall.

It is, indeed, a crucial factor in achievement of positive outcomes, and central to this educative process is emphasizing international education and values. Education curriculum should emphasize education for peace, human rights, democracy and sustainable development for the entire world; to develop love for humankind and the environment; to create awareness of the importance of living in harmony with each other and with the environment; to develop in individuals the skills of interpersonal communication in order to promote empathy, understanding, acceptance and tolerance; to enable individuals to give and receive; to create an awareness of the solidarity of humankind irrespective of race, religion, creed and culture; to create awareness of the uniqueness of individuals in their socio-cultural context; to enhance the quality of human relationships through a sense of dignity and equality, mutual trust, and an appreciation of others' beliefs and cultures; to promote active participation in all aspects of social life; and to ensure freedom of expression, belief and worship; to develop effective democratic decision making that will lead to equity, justice and peace; to create awareness of the need for individual freedom and autonomy with responsibility; to develop the skills of reasoning, to enable learners to make informed decisions.

“If reasonable people do not feel the presence of love within the universe, that doesn't mean it's not there”. (Rumi)

HOW SOME OF THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD VIEW EMPATHY

HINDUISM/BUDDHISM: Buddha's mission was to stop unnecessary animal killing and, therefore, he preached that the greatest religious principle is nonviolence.

This verse clearly says that one should be compassionate to all living entities whether human, animal, tree or plant, all living entities are sons of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord

Krishna says in Bhagavad Gita (14:4): It is also mentioned that if one is unhappy to see the distress of other living beings and happy to see their happiness, are considered pious and benevolent.

CHRISTIANITY: Apostle Peter counselled Christians to have “compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous . . .” (1 Peter 3:8 KJV21). Apostle Paul recommended similar sentiments when he exhorted fellow Christians to “rejoice with those rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (*Romans* 12:15).

It was Apostle John who had said, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17)

JUDAISM: King Solomon says in *Proverbs* (19:17): “He who is gracious to a poor man is [in fact merely] extending a loan to God, and He will repay him his reward.”

Tzedakah (charity) is a mitzvah (commandment), and when a person loves doing mitzvot (feeding the poor), he will invest more in the mitzvah than in his ordinary needs.

ISLAM: The Quran says: By an act of mercy from God, you [Prophet] were gentle in your dealings with them—had you been harsh, or hard-hearted, they would have dispersed and left you—so pardon them and ask forgiveness for them. Consult with them about matters; then, when you have decided on a course of action, put your trust in God: God loves those who put their trust in Him. (*Surah* 3: 159):

Even the basis of fighting in Allah’s way is about empathy and compassion

As is given in *Surah An-Nisa* (4:75): “And what reason you have not to fight in the way of Allah, and of the weak among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grant us from Thee a friend, and grant us from Thee a helper.” (4:75).

HOW EMPATHY CAN BE DEVELOPED

Empathy can be developed through:

- (i) Cultivate curiosity about strangers,
- (ii) Challenge prejudices and discover commonalities,
- (iii) Try another person’s life,
- (iv) Listen hard and open up,
- (v) Inspire mass action and social change,
- (vi) Develop an ambitious imagination.

Tests That Can Measure Empathy

There are various tests that can measure empathy with manifold sample variations. The present paper leaves its reader to disentangle themselves from the concerns about achievement and apprehension of the failures related to their *Self* because *our* existence depend upon other individuals – people, group, community, society, world and even universe, as we are a part of it. So why don’t we try to understand our own *feeling*?

If you can disentangle
yourself from your selfish self
all heavenly spirits
will stand ready to serve you

you are the bird of happiness
in the magic of existence
what a pity when you let
yourself be chained and caged.
if you can finally hunt down
your own beastly self
you have the right
to claim Solomon's kingdom (Rumi)

CONCLUSION

Empathy is a powerful, efficient communication tool when used appropriately during a medical interview. Empathy extends understanding of the patient beyond the history and symptoms to include values, ideas, and feelings. Benefits of improved empathetic communication are tangible for both physician and patient. Rumi's poetry, especially the first two books his Masnawi, helps enhance awareness of *Self*, and emphasizes *empathy* as the essence of humanism. No doubt his Sufic teachings are gaining global acknowledgement transcending geographical and ethnic boundaries.

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