

## **Full Presence and Intellectual Understanding**

So let me outline some of the components of empathy, things that we need to learn to do, to stay connected to people, so we can really connect with that flow of energy that's coming through them.

The most important part of empathy is the hardest.

It involves our presence, our full presence to what is alive in this person at this moment.

Martin Buber, the Israeli philosopher and psychotherapist, says that presence is the most powerful gift one person can give to another.

A powerful gift and a precious gift.

For when we give this gift to others, this gift of our presence, it is a major component of healing. It is a major component of the connection that's necessary for people to enjoy contributing to each other's well-being.

But it's not an easy thing to do to give this presence to others, because, as Buber also says, it requires bringing nothing from the past into the present. It requires seeing the present moment as a newborn infant, that's never been before, will never be again.

So if we start to think about what the person is saying, we lose this presence. And so all of the theories that we might bring into the present moment about this person, because we might know them - that will get in the way of our staying empathically connected. Or if you have studied psychology as I did for many years at the university and were trained how to analyze people, what leads them to behave as they do - that kind of intellectual training and analysis of what goes on historically that creates present problems - that can get in the way of empathy.

One of the things that we need to stay clear about then is not to get mixed up intellectual understanding with empathy.

Intellectual understanding is the kind that I'm saying that I received at the university for intellectually understanding what are the kind of things historically that can contribute to people developing certain tensions, problems. And even if this is an accurate assumption, that these kind of things are going on in the person, it means that I'm not connecting with this person as a unique person in this moment. I'm bringing in theories and ideas about them.

So I am mixing up intellectual understanding with empathy.

*Marshall Rosenberg*