

# SELF ACTUALIZATION

*"Self Actualization is the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately, of what the organism is."*

- Abraham Maslow

Maslow studied healthy people, most psychologists study sick people.

The characteristics listed here are the results of 20 years of study of people who had the "full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc.."

Self-actualization implies the attainment of the basic needs of physiological, safety/security, love/belongingness, and self-esteem.

## Maslow's Basic Principles:

1. The normal personality is characterized by unity, integration, consistency, and coherence. Organization is the natural state, and disorganization is pathological.
2. The organism can be analyzed by differentiating its parts, but no part can be studied in isolation. The whole functions according to laws that cannot be found in the parts.
3. The organism has one sovereign drive, that of self-actualization. People strive continuously to realize their inherent potential by whatever avenues are open to them.
4. The influence of the external environment on normal development is minimal. The organism's potential, if allowed to unfold by an appropriate environment, will produce a healthy, integrated personality.
5. The comprehensive study of one person is more useful than the extensive investigation, in many people, of an isolated psychological function.
6. The salvation of the human being is not to be found in either behaviorism or in psychoanalysis, (which deals with only the darker, meaner half of the individual). We must deal with the questions of value, individuality, consciousness, purpose, ethics and the higher reaches of human nature.
7. Man is basically good not evil.
8. Psychopathology generally results from the denial, frustration or twisting of our essential nature.
9. Therapy of any sort, is a means of restoring a person to the path of self-actualization and development along the lines dictated by their inner nature.
10. When the four basic needs have been satisfied, the growth need or self-actualization need arises: A new discontent and restlessness will develop unless the individual is doing what he individually is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write--in short, what people can be they must be.

## Characteristics of Self Actualizing People

### **Realistic**

Realistically oriented, SA persons have a more efficient perception of reality, they have comfortable relations with it. This is extended to all areas of life. SA persons are unthreatened, unfrightened by the unknown. they have a superior ability to reason, to see the truth. They are logical and efficient.

## **Acceptance**

Accept themselves, others and the natural world the way they are. Sees human nature as is, have a lack of crippling guilt or shame, enjoy themselves without regret or apology, they have no unnecessary inhibitions.

## **Spontaneity, Simplicity, Naturalness**

Spontaneous in their inner life, thoughts and impulses, they are unhampered by convention. Their ethics is autonomous, they are individuals, and are motivated to continual growth.

## **Problem Centering**

Focus on problems outside themselves, other centered. They have a mission in life requiring much energy, their mission is their reason for existence. They are serene, characterized by a lack of worry, and are devoted to duty.

## **Detachment: The Need for Privacy**

Alone but not lonely, unflappable, retain dignity amid confusion and personal misfortunes, objective. They are self starters, responsible for themselves, own their behavior.

## **Autonomy: Independent of Culture and Environment**

SA's rely on inner self for satisfaction. Stable in the face of hard knocks, they are self contained, independent from love and respect.

## **Continued Freshness of Appreciation**

Have a fresh rather than stereotyped appreciation of people and things. Appreciation of the basic good in life, moment to moment living is thrilling, transcending and spiritual. They live the present moment to the fullest.

## **Peak experiences**

"Feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placement in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened, so that the subject was to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences." *Abraham Maslow*

Maslow asked his subjects to think of the most wonderful experience or experiences of their lives--the happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music or suddenly "being hit" by a book or a painting or from some great creative moment. He found that people undergoing peak experiences felt more integrated, more at one with the world, more in command of their own lives, more spontaneous, less aware of space and time, more perceptive, more self determined, more playful.

## **Effects of peak experiences:**

- The removal of neurotic symptoms

- A tendency to view oneself in a more healthy way
- Change in one's view of other people and of one's relations with them
- Change in one's view of the world
- The release of creativity, spontaneity and expressiveness
- A tendency to remember the experience and to try to duplicate it
- A tendency to view life in general as more worthwhile.

## Gemeinschaftsgefühl

Identification, sympathy, and affection for mankind, kinship with the good, the bad and the ugly, older-brother attitude. Truth is clear to him, can see things others cannot see.

## Interpersonal relations

Profound, intimate relationships with few. Capable of greater love than others consider possible. Benevolence, affection and friendliness shown to everyone.

## Democratic values and attitudes

Able to learn from anyone, humble. Friendly with anyone regardless of class, education, political belief, race or color.

## Discrimination: means and ends, Good and Evil

Do not confuse between means and ends. They do no do wrong. Enjoy the here and now, getting to goal-- not just the result. They make the most tedious task an enjoyable game. They have their own inner moral standards (appearing amoral to others).

## Philosophical, unhostile sense of humor

Jokes are teaching metaphors, intrinsic to the situation, spontaneous, can laugh at themselves, never make jokes that hurt others.

## Creativity

Inborn uniqueness that carries over into everything they do, see the real and true more easily, original, inventive and less inhibited.

## Resistance to enculturation: Transcendence of any particular culture

Inner detachment from culture, folkways are used but of no consequence, calm long term culture improvement, indignation with injustice, inner autonomy and outer acceptance. Transcend the environment rather than just cope.

## Imperfections

Painfully aware of own imperfections, joyfully aware of own growth process. Impatient with self when stuck, real life pain, not imagined.

## Values

Philosophical acceptance of the nature of his self, human nature, social life, nature, physical reality, remains realistically human.

## Resolution of dichotomies

Polar opposites merge into a third, higher phenomenon, as though the two have united, work becomes play, most childlike person is most wise, opposite forces no longer felt as a conflict. Desires are in excellent accord with reason.

Maslow says there are two processes necessary for self-actualization: self exploration and action. The deeper the self exploration, the closer one comes to self-actualization.

## EIGHT WAYS TO SELF ACTUALIZE

1. Experience things fully, vividly, selflessly. Throw yourself into the experiencing of something: concentrate on it fully, let it totally absorb you.
2. Life is an ongoing process of choosing between safety (out of fear and need for defense) and risk (for the sake of progress and growth): Make the growth choice a dozen times a day.
3. Let the self emerge. Try to shut out the external clues as to what you should think, feel, say, and so on, and let your experience enable you to say what you truly feel.
4. When in doubt, be honest. If you look into yourself and are honest, you will also take responsibility. Taking responsibility is self-actualizing.
5. Listen to your own tastes. Be prepared to be unpopular.
6. Use your intelligence, work to do well the things you want to do, no matter how insignificant they seem to be.
7. Make peak experiencing more likely: get rid of illusions and false notions. Learn what you are good at and what your potentialities are not.
8. Find out who you are, what you like and don't like, what is good and what is bad for you, where you are going, what your mission is. Opening yourself up to yourself in this way means identifying defenses--and then finding the courage to give them up.

## SELF ACTUALIZATION

Maslow (1954), believed that man has a natural drive to healthiness, or self actualization. He believed that man has basic, (biological and psychological) needs that have to be fulfilled in order to be free enough to feel the desire for the higher levels of realization. He also believed that the organism has the natural, unconscious and innate capacity to seek its needs. (*Maslow 1968*)

In other words, man has an internal, natural, drive to become the best possible person he can be.

"...he has within him a pressure toward unity of personality, toward spontaneous expressiveness, toward full individuality and identity, toward seeing the truth rather than being blind, toward being creative, toward being good, and a lot else. That is, the human being is so constructed that he presses toward what most people would call good values, toward serenity, kindness, courage, honesty, love, unselfishness, and goodness." (*Maslow, 1968, p. 155.*)

Maslow believed that not only does the organism know what it needs to eat to maintain itself healthy, but also man knows intuitively what he needs to become the best possible, mentally healthy and happy "being". I use the word "being" because Maslow goes far beyond what the average person considers good physical and mental health. He talked about higher consciousness, esthetic and peak experiences, and Being. He stressed the importance of moral and ethical behavior that will lead man naturally to discovering, becoming himself.

"The state of being without a system of values is psychopathogenic, we are learning. The human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life, a religion or religion-surrogate to live by and understand by, in about the same sense he needs sunlight, calcium or love. This I have called the "cognitive need to understand." The value- illnesses which result from valuelessness are called variously anhedonia, anomie, apathy, amorality, hopelessness, cynicism, etc., and can become somatic illness as well. Historically, we are in a value interregnum in which all externally given value systems have proven failures (political, economic, religious, etc.) e.g., nothing is worth dying for. What man needs but doesn't have, he seeks for unceasingly, and he becomes dangerously ready to jump at any hope, good or bad. The cure for this disease is obvious. We need a validated, usable system of human values that we can believe in and devote ourselves to (be willing to die for), because they are true rather than because we are exhorted to "believe and have faith." Such an empirically based Weltanschauung seems now to be a real possibility, at least in theoretical outline." (*Maslow, 1968, p. 206.*)

Morality then is natural. If we use our capacity to think, are honest, sincere and open, we arrive at moral and ethical behavior naturally. The problem is to not destroy our ability to become ourselves.

"Pure spontaneity consists of free, uninhibited uncontrolled, trusting, unpremeditated expression of the self, i.e., of the psychic forces, with minimal interference by consciousness. Control, will, caution, self-criticism, measure, deliberateness are the brakes upon this expression made intrinsically necessary by the laws of the social and natural world, and secondarily, made necessary by the fear of the psyche itself." (*1968, p. 197.*) To me, this means listening to the inner self, the unconscious, the spirit.

"This ability of healthier people to dip into the unconscious and preconscious, to use and value their primary processes instead of fearing them, to accept their impulses instead of always controlling them, to be able to regress voluntarily without fear, turns out to be one of the main conditions of creativity."

"This development toward the concept of a healthy unconscious and of a healthy irrationality, sharpens our awareness of the limitations of purely abstract thinking, of verbal thinking and of analytic thinking. If our hope is to describe the world fully, a place is necessary for preverbal, ineffable, metaphorical, primary process, concrete-experience, intuitive and esthetic types of cognition, for there are certain aspects of reality which can be cognized in no other way." (*p. 208*)

Meditation, self-hypnosis, imagery and the like are sources of discovering our inner being. To become self-actualized, Maslow said we need two things, inner exploration and action.

"An important existential problem is posed by the fact that self-actualizing persons (and all people in their peak- experiences) occasionally live out-of-time and out-of-the- world (atemporal and aspatial) even though mostly they must live in the outer world. Living in the inner psychic world (which is ruled by psychic laws and not by the laws of outer-reality), i.e., the world of experience, of emotion, of wishes and fears and hopes, of love of poetry, art and fantasy, is different from living in and adapting to the non-psychic reality which runs by laws he never made and which are not essential to his nature even though he has to live by them. (He could, after all, live in other kinds of worlds, as any science fiction fan knows.) The person who is not afraid of this inner, psychic world, can enjoy it to such an extent that it may be called Heaven by contrast with the more effortful, fatiguing, externally responsible world of "reality," of striving and coping, of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood. This is true even though the healthier person can also adapt more easily and enjoyably to the "real" world, and has better "reality testing," i.e., doesn't confuse it with his inner psychic world." (*p. 213*)

Maslow has made a case for natural, human goodness. Man is basically good, not evil, he has the capacity to be an efficient, healthy and happy person. But he must nurture the capacity with awareness, honesty, introspection and maintain his freedom: to freely respond to internal and external events (values), to be himself at all costs.

The knowledge that man has this capacity motivates him to realize it. It also obliges him to actively work toward self realization. We cannot not respond to the call that a value makes on us. This whole discussion shows the importance of studying Values and Ethics. We are obliged to discover the range of our possible moral behavior. If we are capable of being healthy and happy, then we are obliged to work toward that goal.