

Today as part of our self-development process, we will look at the famous person:

Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist. He is best known for creating a hierarchy of needs - the culmination of which is “self-actualization.” He wanted to know what helped some people to live in positive mental health.

He lived from 1908 to 1970.

He grew up in Brooklyn, New York, as the oldest of seven children. His parents were first-generation Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine.

He may have thought about “needs” because his own mother certainly didn’t fulfill his needs. He is quoted as saying, *"What I had reacted to was not only her physical appearance, but also her values and world view, her stinginess, her total selfishness, her lack of love for anyone else in the world—even her own husband and children—her narcissism, her Negro prejudice, her exploitation of everyone, her assumption that anyone was wrong who disagreed with her, her lack of friends, her sloppiness and dirtiness..."*

Although he later said it was important to focus on the positive qualities in people. Whether he managed to do this about his own mother, we are not sure.

To really feel like Abraham Maslow, wear a suit and a short haired curly wig. Add a mustache and goatee beard. Carry some academic books.

Maslow took a humanistic approach to psychology as he felt that people possess the inner resources for growth and healing and that the point of therapy is to help remove obstacles to individuals' achieving them.

Maslow wrote about what he saw as his "Eupsychia club" which he said meant people who had *"decentralized, voluntary yet coordinated, productive, and with a powerful and effective code of ethics (which works)."*

He said, *“heroes that I write for, my judges, the ones I want to please: Jefferson, Spinoza, Socrates, Aristotle, James, Bergson, Norman Thomas, Upton Sinclair (both heroes of my youth).”*

He believed Albert Einstein, Henry David Thoreau, Eleanor Roosevelt and Mother Teresa to be examples of self-actualized people.

He felt that all of these people were "reality centered" and able to differentiate the fraudulent from the genuine. They saw life's problems as demanding solutions. They were comfortable being alone yet had healthy personal relationships with a few close friends and family. They valued these relationships more than having a large number of shallow relationships. They weren't too bound by social conventions.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs started with the basic needs we have for food, water, sleep, sex, homeostasis, and excretion.

The next level is the need for shelter and safety.

The third level of need for love and belonging - being part of a family and friend network.

The fourth level is the sense of accomplishment or esteem where we hope for some recognition and appreciation or status in society.

Then there is the fifth cognitive level where we explore intellectually and provide our own internal stimulation. This is our need to know and understand.

After that is the sixth aesthetic level, where we crave harmony, order and beauty.

The highest and seventh level is the need for self-actualization - a feeling of harmony and understanding because we feel we are using our full potential.

Most people these days only show 5 levels and ignore the cognitive and aesthetic levels. Some put an extra level above self-actualization which they call the "transcendence" level. And Maslow never represented his hierarchy as a pyramid.

Many have since criticized Maslow's model as lacking any research or evidence to support it. Even Maslow himself said, *“My motivation theory was published 20 years ago... in all that time nobody repeated it, or tested it, or really analyzed it or criticized it. They just used it, swallowed it whole with only the most minor modifications.”* But many people still find it useful to think about which levels of needs they have had satisfied.

Some people divide the needs into two categories - deficiencies and growth needs. Deficiency needs include physiological, security, social, and self-esteem needs. Growth needs are the cognitive, aesthetic and self-actualization levels. Unlike deficiency needs, they are motivated by the desire to grow as a person and reach their full potential.

What level do you think you have reached in this hierarchy of needs? Are your basic needs met? Do you feel safe and secure? Do you feel loved? Do you feel appreciated? Do you feel intellectually fulfilled? Do you crave harmony, order and beauty? Do you feel you are using your full potential?

[PAUSE]

Just below “self-actualization” is “self-esteem.” Narcissists tend to be overcompensating for low self esteem. Maslow felt that his own family didn't appreciate him enough. But maybe they were just keeping him real and trying to stop his ego from getting away from him.

Maslow said self-actualizing people value truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness and self-sufficiency.

People, Maslow felt could have “peak experiences” - high points in life when they felt in harmony with themselves and their surroundings.

Some people describe these moments as being filled with joy of the purest kind. For others, they are a spiritual experience. Most people find them significant and fulfilling. During these experiences we feel fully alive.

Peak experiences play an important role in self-actualization – the highest level of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (although he never portrayed it as a pyramid). But ordinary people can have peak experiences whereas few people attain a state of self-actualization. Maslow felt that self-actualized people tend to have peak experiences more often than ordinary people do.

Some people find that experiences like this are more likely to occur during artistic, athletic or religious activities. Or while they are spending time in nature or during intimate moments with family or friends.

Do you ever have peak experiences like this?

[PAUSE]

During the 1960s Maslow founded the school of “transpersonal psychology” with Stanislav Grof, Viktor Frankl, James Fadiman, Anthony Sutich, Miles Vich and Michael Murphy. Before he did this, Maslow had taken a “humanistic” approach to psychology as he felt that people possess the inner resources for growth and healing and that the point of therapy is to help remove obstacles to individuals’ achieving them.

Maslow later felt that “humanistic psychology” was incapable of explaining all aspects of human experience. He felt that various mystical, ecstatic, or spiritual states known as “peak experiences” were beyond self-actualization (the highest “need” on his hierarchy of needs).

Are peak experiences the same as “flow” experiences? Peak experiences are similar to the concept known as “flow” described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi – a positive psychologist. During flow experiences, you become so involved in an activity that the world seems to fade away and nothing else seems to matter. Time flies by. This state of flow can happen during a peak experience. But not all states of flow are classed as peak experiences.

How can you have a peak experience? It helps if you have removed yourself from distractions like notifications that you have received new emails. Don’t let your mind be absorbed by the shallowness of

meaningless tasks like sorting emails or scrolling through social media. You have to enter a state in which you are focused. Doing some exercise beforehand can help as then oxygen is flooding your brain and you aren't just slipping back into the malaise of feeling tired.

Maslow later said that "plateau experiences" were also possible - longer lasting periods where one felt serene. In older age, people often had a shift in life values about what is actually important and what isn't.

Do you think you are having a plateau experience? Do you sometimes reassess what you value in life? What do you value most now?

[PAUSE]

Make a point of telling your friends or partner the insights today's lesson have given you when thinking about your own life.