

Abraham Maslow

Abraham Harold Maslow was born April 1, 1908 in Brooklyn, New York. He was the first of seven children born to his parents, who were uneducated Jewish immigrants from Russia. His parents, realising their limitations, pushed Abraham hard so that he would be well educated and have a better life. To satisfy his parents, he first studied law at the City College of New York (CCNY). After three years he transferred to Cornell, and then back to CCNY. Maslow did not do well at CCNY, his grades were always low. He then moved to Wisconsin so that he could attend the University of Wisconsin and study psychology, it was here that his academic work began to improve dramatically. He spent time there working with Harry Harlow, who is famous for his experiments with baby rhesus monkeys and attachment behaviour. He received his BA in 1930, his MA in 1931, and his PhD in 1934, all in psychology, all from the University of Wisconsin. A year after graduation, he returned to New York to work with E. L. Thorndike at Columbia, where Maslow became interested in research on human sexuality. During this period of his life, he came into contact with the many European intellectuals that were immigrating to the US, and Brooklyn in particular, at that time people like Adler, Fromm, Horney, as well as several Freudian psychologists. In 1952 he met Kurt Goldstein, who had originated the idea of self-actualisation in his famous book, *The Organism* (1934). It was also here that he began his crusade for a humanistic psychology.

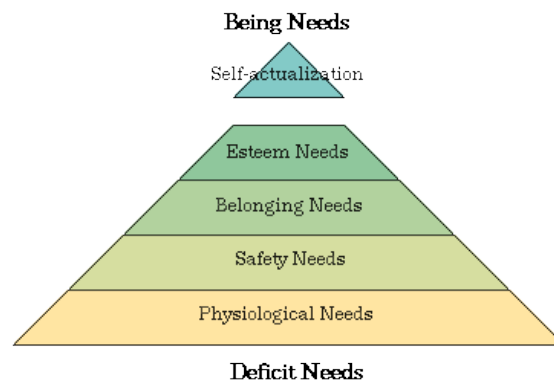
During the 1950s, humanistic psychology began as an argument to psychoanalysis and behaviourism, which dominated psychology at the time. Psychoanalysis focused on understanding the unconscious motivations that drive behaviour while behaviourism studied the conditioning processes that produce behaviour. Humanist thinkers felt that both psychoanalysis and behaviourism were too pessimistic, always focusing on the most tragic of emotions and failing to take into account the role of personal choice. Humanistic psychology was instead focused on each individual's potential and stressed the importance of growth and self-actualisation. The basic belief of humanistic psychology is that people are innately good and that mental and social problems result from influences which may alter this natural tendency.

Maslow spent his final years in semi-retirement in California, he died of a heart attack on June 8 1970 after years of ill health.

Maslow's Theory of Needs.,

We all have needs or what we perceive as needs. Some people may say "I need a new car" or "I need to get a new job". These are not exactly needs but more 'desires'. We have many needs both physical and emotional but we focus on them one at a time, e.g. if you are really hungry, (not eaten for 2 to 3 days hungry), you have the need to eat and all other needs are overridden, however if you are hungry and thirsty, you will tend to try to take care of the thirst first. The logic being that you may be able to do without food for weeks, but you can only do without water for a couple of days! Thirst is a "stronger" need than hunger. Likewise, if you are very thirsty, but you can't breathe, which is more important?. So breathing is more important than drinking, which is more important than eating, and so on. On the other hand, sex is less powerful than any of these and although a physiological basic need, you won't die if you don't get it.

Maslow took this idea and created his hierarchy of needs. Beyond the physiological needs there are the needs for safety and security, the needs for love and belonging, the needs for esteem, and the need to actualize the self



1. The Physical, (physiological needs).

These include the need for oxygen, water, protein, salt, sugar, calcium, and other minerals and vitamins. They also include the need to maintain a pH balance, (getting too acidic or alkaline will kill you,) and temperature (98.6 or near to it). Beyond these there are the needs to be active, to rest, to sleep, to get rid of wastes, (CO₂, sweat, urine, and faeces), to avoid pain, and to have sex.

Maslow believed, that these are individual needs, and that a lack of, e.g. vitamin C, will lead to a very specific hunger for things which have in the past provided that vitamin C, e.g. orange juice.

2. The safety and security needs.

When the physiological needs are taken care of, this second layer of needs comes into play. The need to find a home, shelter, safe circumstances, stability, protection, structure in life, order and limits.

The individual will become concerned, not with needs like hunger and thirst, but with their fears and anxieties. In the ordinary adult, this set of needs show in the form of our urges to have a home in a safe neighbourhood, job security, savings, a good retirement plan and life or accident insurance.

3. The love and belonging needs.

When physiological needs and safety needs are met, a third layer starts to show up. You begin to feel the need for friends, a wife or husband, children, relationships in general, a sense of community. The individual wishes to avoid loneliness and social anxieties. In our day-to-day life, we show these needs in our desires to marry, have a family, be a part of a community, a member of a church or a club. This is also a part of what we look for in a career.

4. The esteem needs.

Maslow looked at Esteem needs in two parts, a lower one and a higher one. The lower one is the need for the respect of others, the need for status, recognition, attention, reputation, appreciation and dignity. The higher one involves the need for self-respect, including such feelings as confidence,

competence, achievement, independence and freedom. Maslow stated that this is the “higher” form because, unlike the respect of others, once you have self-respect, it’s a lot harder to lose.

When the Esteem needs are not met the result may be low self-esteem and inferiority complexes. Maslow felt that these were at the roots of many, if not most, of our psychological problems. In modern countries, most of us have what we need in regard to our physiological and safety needs and we often have sufficient love and belonging, it is the respect of others and ourselves that often seems so hard to achieve.

Maslow called all of the preceding four levels the ‘Deficit needs’, or D-needs. If you don’t have enough of something, i.e. you have a deficit, you feel the need for that something. But if you get all you need, you feel nothing at all, in other words, the specific need ceases to be a motivating factor in life. “Not needing what you have got till it’s gone”, Maslow described these levels in terms of homeostasis. Homeostasis is the principle by which a central heating thermostat operates: When it gets too cold, it switches on; When it gets too hot, it switches off. The body, when it lacks a certain substance, develops a hunger for it; When it gets enough of it, then the hunger stops. Maslow extended this homeostatic principle to needs, such as safety, belonging, and esteem. Maslow saw all these needs as survival needs. Even love and esteem are needed for the maintenance of health. Maslow stated that all individuals have these needs built in to us genetically, like instincts. In fact, he calls them instinctoid, instinct-like, needs. (1)

In terms of overall development, we move through these levels a bit like stages. New-born babies focus is on the physiological. Soon they begin to recognise that the need to be safe. Soon after that, they crave attention and affection. A bit later, they look for self-esteem. Under stressful conditions, or when survival is threatened, we may “regress” to a lower need level. When your career falls flat,(Security), you might seek the attention of your family,(love and belonging). If your wife or husband leaves you, it seems that love is again all you ever wanted. If you face bankruptcy after a long time of being financially secure, you suddenly can’t think of anything except money.

If you have significant problems along your life development a period of extreme insecurity or hunger as a child, or the loss of a family member through death, or significant neglect or abuse, you may “fixate” on that set of needs for the rest of your life This was Maslow’s understanding of neurosis. You may have gone through a war as a child. Now you have everything your heart needs, yet you still find yourself worrying over having enough money and keeping food stocked up. Your parents may have divorced when you were young, now you have a wonderful spouse yet you get jealous or worry constantly that they are going to leave you because you are not “good enough” for them.

Self-actualisation

The last level is a bit different. Maslow has used a variety of terms to refer to this level: He has called it growth motivation (in contrast to deficit motivation), being needs (or B-needs, in contrast to D-needs), and self-actualization. These are needs that do not involve balance or homeostasis. Once engaged, they continue to be felt. In fact, they are likely to become stronger as we “feed” them. They involve the continuous desire to fulfil potentials, to “be all that you can be.” They are a matter of you becoming the most complete, the fullest, “you”.

If you want to be fully self-actualising, you need to have all your lower needs taken care of, to a considerable extent. The logic being that if you are hungry, you may be constantly struggling to get food; if you are unsafe, you will be continuously on guard; if you are alone and unloved, you have to satisfy that need; if you have a sense of low self-esteem, you may be defensive. When your lower needs are unmet, you can't concentrate or devote yourself to fulfilling your potential or ambitions to better yourself. Maslow suggested that because of all the problems in the world, poverty, hunger and war, only about two percent of the world's population may be self-actualising. Maslow described self-actualisation by looking at the kind of people he called self-actualisers. He did this by using a qualitative method called biographical analysis. He began by picking out a group of people, some historical figures, some people he knew, who he felt clearly met the standard of self-actualisation. Included in this group were Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jane Adams, William James, Albert Schweitzer, Benedict Spinoza, and Aldous Huxley, plus 12 unnamed people who were alive at the time Maslow did his research. He then looked at their biographies, writings, the acts and words of those he knew personally. From these sources, he developed a list of qualities that seemed characteristic of these people, as opposed to non self-actualising people.

These people were reality-centered, which means they could differentiate what is fake and dishonest from what is real and genuine. They were problem solving centered, meaning they treated life's difficulties as problems demanding solutions, not as personal troubles to be surrendered to. And they had a different perception of 'means and ends'. They felt that the ends don't necessarily justify the means, that the means could be ends themselves, and that the means the journey was often more important than the ends.

The self-actualisers also had a different way of relating to others. First, they enjoyed a degree of solitude, and were comfortable being alone. And they enjoyed deeper personal relations with a few close friends and family members, rather than more shallow relationships with many people. They enjoyed autonomy, a relative independence from physical and social needs. And they were not susceptible to social pressure to be "well adjusted" or to "fit in". They had a non hostile sense of humour, preferring to joke at their own expense, or at the human condition, and never directing their humour at others. They had a quality Maslow called 'acceptance of self and others, by which he meant that these people would be more likely to take you as you are than try to change you into what they thought you should be. This same acceptance applied in their attitudes towards themselves. They were often strongly motivated to change any negative qualities in themselves that could be changed, they preferred being themselves rather than being artificial. Further, they had a sense of humility and respect towards others, something Maslow also called democratic values, meaning that they were open to ethnic and individual variety. They had a quality Maslow called human kinship, social interest, compassion and humanity. And this was accompanied by a strong ethics, which was spiritual but seldom religious in nature. Maslow doesn't think that self-actualisers are perfect. There were several flaws or imperfections he discovered along the way. First, they often suffered considerable anxiety and guilt, however this was realistic anxiety and guilt, rather than misplaced or neurotic. Some of them were absentminded and overly kind. And finally, some of them had unexpected moments of ruthlessness, surgical coldness, and a loss of humour. Two other points he makes about these self-actualisers: Their values were "natural" and seemed to flow effortlessly from their personalities. And they appeared to understand the differences between the spiritual and the physical, the selfish and the unselfish.

Metaneeds and metapathologies

Another way in which Maslow approached the problem of what is self-actualisation is was to talk about the special, driving needs of the self-actualizers. They need the following 'metaneeds' values in their lives in order to be happy.

Truth not dishonesty.

Goodness, rather than evil.

Beauty, not ugliness or vulgarity.

Personal choice rather than forced choices.

Aliveness, not deadness, not living a mechanical type of life

Uniqueness not uniformity.

Perfection not sloppiness, inconsistency, or accident.

Completion rather than incompleteness.

Justice and order not injustice and lawlessness.

Simplicity not unnecessary complexity.

Richness not environmental impoverishment.

Effortlessness not strain.

Playfulness, not grim, humourless, drudgery.

Self-sufficiency not dependency.

Meaningfulness rather than senselessness.

It may appear obvious that everyone should have these values, however, if you are living through an economic depression or a war, or are living in poverty, do you worry about these issues, or do you worry about getting enough to eat and a roof over your head? Maslow believed that much of the what is wrong with the world comes down to the fact that very few people are really interested in these values, not because they are bad people, but because they haven't had their basic needs met. When a self-actualiser doesn't get these metaneeds fulfilled, they respond with metapathologies, a list of problems as long as the list of metaneeds. When forced to live without them the self-actualiser develops depression, despair, disgust, alienation, and cynicism. Maslow hoped that his efforts at describing the self-actualising person would eventually lead to a "periodic table" of the kinds of qualities, problems, pathologies, and even solutions characteristic of higher levels of human potential. Over time, he devoted increasing attention, not to his own theory, but to humanistic psychology and the human potentials movement.

Toward the end of his life Maslow inaugurated what he called the fourth force in psychology:

Freudian and other "depth" psychologies constituted the first force;

Behaviourism was the second force Humanism, including the European existentialists, were the third force. The fourth force was the transpersonal psychologies which had their roots in Eastern philosophies and investigated such things as meditation, higher levels of consciousness, and even parapsychological phenomena.

Maslow was an inspirational figure in personality theories. In the 1960's people were tired of the mechanistic messages of the behaviourists and psychologists who concentrated on the faults in life. They were looking for meaning and purpose in their lives, a higher, more mystical meaning. Maslow was one of the pioneers in the movement to bring the human being back into psychology, and the person back into personality. Maslow's message should not be lost: Psychology is, first and foremost, about people, real people in real lives, and not about computer models, statistical analyses, rat behaviour, test scores, and laboratories.