



Institute for
the Awakened Mind

Self-Actualization and the Peak Experience

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Maslow's Characteristics of Self-Actualized People * Higher Motivations (Metaneeds) * Peak Experiences
* Rogers' Fully Functioning Person * List of Commonalities * Aftereffects of Peak Experiences *
Relaxation and The Golden Circle Meditation (A Peak Experience) * Self-Actualization Questionnaire

Self-actualization is defined by Maslow as the act or process of manifesting the capabilities for which one had the potentiality. Self-actualization is therefore the autogenerative form of psychotechnics, which we have already defined as the art and technology of teaching people to manifest that for which they have potentiality.

In discussing the higher levels of cognitive development, the sixth (creative), the seventh (psychedelic) and the eighth (illuminative), we are in relatively unexplored territory, and there is some difficulty in defining terms. However, in this present account the phrase 'self-actualization' will be used indiscriminately to refer to operations at any of these three levels. In fact, as Gowan has been at pains to point out, the upper reach of the continuum from the stage of creativity onward is open-ended, for once an individual reaches the creative stage cognitively, his conscious mind is opened and enlarged, and he gains new horizons and options. The theory of stages of development becomes much less significant than the study of the developmental process, and for all we know, looking at the system as we do, from below, there may well be advanced stages or processes that we cannot even conceive.

The creative stage of development has been quite profusely described in the literature of psychology (Tart, 'Altered States of Consciousness', 1969). The eighth stage is still pretty much unknown territory.

Although we can say little about the final stage, those processes which are occasional and transitory in the psychedelic period become habitual and fixed in the illuminative stage, and thus the doors or barriers between the conscious and the preconscious mind are done away with almost entirely.

As Gowan has explained (ibid), the self-actualizing person is one who is on the way to the upper stages of the cognitive hierarchy, but who is still among us ordinary mortals and available for study. S.A. individuals, says Maslow ('A Theory of Motivation: The Biological Rooting of the Value-Life', J. Humanistic Psychology, 1976, 7. No. 2) "have a feeling of belongingness and rootedness, they are satisfied in their love needs, have friends and feel loved and lovable, they have status and place in life and respect from other people, and they have a reasonable feeling of worth and self-respect . . . we must make an immediate distinction between the ordinary motives of people below the level of self-actualization – that is, people motivated by the basic (human) needs – and the motivations of people who are sufficiently gratified in all their basic needs and therefore are no longer motivated by them primarily, but rather by 'higher' motivations. It is therefore convenient to call these higher motives and needs for self-actualizing persons by the name 'metaneeds' and also to differentiate the category of motivation from the category of 'metamotivation'. Maslow then re-defines the self-actualizing person as one who is:

- a) sufficiently free from illness,
- b) sufficiently gratified in his basic needs,
- c) positively using his talents and capacities,
- d) motivated by some values which he strives for and to which he is loyal.

Maslow says that the self-actualizing person is one more likely to have a peak experience and defines the peak experience as "a moment in the life of the individual when he felt strong, sure, and in complete control. He is functioning fully, and appears to an observer as a more reliable, dependable and trustworthy person". Carl Rogers ('On Becoming a Person, 1961) describes the fully-functioning person, the one who is on the path to full self-actualization, as moving in the direction of the following goals:

1. Increased openness to life and experience, with a reduction in defensiveness.
2. Increasing the here-and-now aspects of living; living in the present moment.
3. Increasing awareness of both the internal and external aspects of each new experience – in fact, a great increase in all-round awareness.

Rogers, like Maslow, based his impressions of fully functioning or self-actualizing personalities upon personal and clinical observations rather than upon scientific research, and he sees creativity as one of the important implications of functioning fully. The following list gives objectively describable and measurable characteristics of the fully functioning or self-actualizing person which would be common to both Rogers and Maslow:

1. Openness to life and to experience.
2. Creativeness.
3. Integration, wholeness, unity of the personality.
4. Firm identity, autonomy, inner guidance.
5. Great awareness, both internal and external.
6. Spontaneity, expressiveness, aliveness.
7. Detachment, objectivity.
8. Ability to love.
9. Clear, efficient perception of reality. No illusions.

It would seem that the process of self-actualization is one which covers a wide track, broad enough for many different kinds of people. For one it will mean a continuous cycle of occasional creative flashes followed by longer rests; for another, genuine psychedelic or peak experiences accompanied by increases in power, energy and creativity; for a third it may mean an opening between the conscious and the unconscious mind which either becomes habitual under certain stimuli or is amenable to control from the conscious side. None of these is to be preferred above the others. All have their value, both for the individual and for mankind. Those who come to self-actualization late in life, say after 45, may never experience the ecstasy appropriate for a younger person, but live happy, constructive and productive lives nevertheless.

Maslow ('Toward a Psychology of Being,' Van Nostrand, 1968) regards certain aftereffects of peak experiences as validating the experiences themselves, and he lists the following:

1. Peak experiences may, and do, have some therapeutic effects in the strict sense of removing symptoms.
2. They can change the person's view of himself in a healthy direction.
3. They can change his view of other people and his relations to them in many ways.
4. They can change more or less permanently his view of the world or of aspects or parts of it.
5. They can release him for greater creativity, spontaneity, expressiveness, idiosyncrasy.
6. He remembers the experience as a very important and desirable happening and seeks to repeat it.
7. The person is more apt to feel that life is worthwhile, even if it is usually drab, painful or ungratifying.
8. Beauty, excitement, honesty, goodness, truth and meaningfulness have been demonstrated to him to exist.

Many other effects could be reported that are ad hoc and idiosyncratic, depending on the particular person, and his particular problems which he considers to be solved or seen in a new light as a result of his experience. Maslow believes that these aftereffects can all be generalized and a feeling for them communicated to other people if the peak experience is likened to a personally-defined Heaven from which the person then returns to earth. Desirable aftereffects of such an experience, some universal and

some individual, are then seen to be very probable. This may be compared with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's statement: "If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he woke – Ay! And what then?" (E. Schneider (ed) 'Coleridge: Selected Poetry & Prose', Rinehart, 1951).

"On the whole," says Maslow, "these good aftereffects are easy enough to understand. What is more difficult to explain is the absence of discernible aftereffects in some people."

Relaxation and Affirmations

Deeper and deeper relaxation – it is in my mind.

I let go, I let go, I let go.

Relaxed, relaxed, relaxed.

Relaxed and calm. The calmness that gives me strength.

The Inner Strength. The strength to do what I have to do.

The Inner Strength. It is calm strength. Easy strength.

It is easier and easier to be strong.

Relaxed, relaxed, relaxed.

Utterly calm and relaxed.

Nothing disturbs me. Nothing alarms me.

I am more and more at peace.

I feel the relaxation and the ease.

The ease of it all through me.

The ease of it in my face, in my mind, in my easy breathing.

Breathing easily and deeply, easily and deeply, easily and deeply.

Golden Circle Meditation: A Peak Experience

Imagine you are seated on a soft, white fleecy cloud, coming up over the hips. The cloud lifts you lightly as it begins to ascend into the limitless sky. Up, up, up you go, seated on the fleecy white surface. Now, directly above, a great waterfall comes into view, a waterfall of warm, golden light.

Gradually you approach the cascading drops of light, and now you begin to feel the pleasant warm spray pouring down over your head. Up, up, into the waterfall you float. The moist golden light pours down over the top of your head, passing through your skull at the back of the eyes, so that you light up with a gentle, golden glow.

There is a faint sound as of running water. The warm golden light moves down to the nose, then the mouth and the chin. It trickles past the neck to the shoulders and the chest, energizing and thrilling each cell of your body that it touches. From the chest to the abdomen, and then the tendons, the point two inches below the navel, it spills down, then separates to flow simultaneously down the outside of both legs.

Now the soles of the feet are bathed in the warm, moist stimulating light. Slowly it moves up the inside of the legs, and through the space between the legs to the tailbone, where it again becomes one unified current.

Now, from the small of the back, it rises to the centre of the spine, touching and revitalizing each cell as it goes. Now up to the shoulder blades, the shoulders, the neck and the base of the skull. Finally, it rises to the top of the head and pours down from that point, leaving the skull with a warm golden light.

Once again the light begins the descent down the front. Past the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the chin, to the neck and shoulders, then the chest, past the heart and abdomen, to the spot two inches below the navel, where it separates and moves down the outer part of the legs to the soles of the feet, bathing the toes and the soles of the feet in soft warmth.

Again, the light begins its passage up the inside of the legs, through the space between the legs, to the tailbone, where it unites to become one stream; then, slowly up the back till it reaches the top of the head, briefly pausing there while it spills down over the skull.

Now starts the slow descent down the front, to the tendons, two inches below the navel. Here let it rest for a few minutes, feeling the glowing warmth at this vital point. No thinking, just awareness of the feeling of that warm golden revitalizing light two inches below the navel.

NOW WE START THE GREAT CIRCLE MEDITATION proper. Please listen very carefully to the sequence.

We take the light from the tanden, between the legs and start up the back. As it moves upward, we slowly inhale, bringing the breath to the top of the head along with the light. In order to make this easier, we also gradually raise the eyes (even though the lids are closed), using the eye movement and the breath as levers or ropes to push the golden light up the back. When the light reaches the top of the head, we hold the breath, eyes tilted up, for a few moments, bathing the entire skull. Then, as the light comes slowly down the front, we gradually exhale and begin to lower the eyes.

Finally, the breath is fully exhaled and the eyes looking down as the light reaches the Dantien or Tanden, two inches below the navel. Here, with the breath out and the eyes cast down, we hold the golden light and sit quietly in awareness of the warm feeling just below the navel. Then we sit for a short while in meditation, feeling but not thinking. Just feel, do not analyse! It is important that we move the light slowly, slowly, with each cell of the body feeling the warmth as it passes. The eyes must be closed and the back straight just as in Zazen. Now do the meditation for yourself properly, that is, in multiples of three orbits. I suggest nine or more bits of three.

Self-Actualization Questionnaire

1. Are you devoted and dedicated to some task, calling, vocation or beloved work? For financial reasons, this may not be your only nor even your most time-consuming occupation, but you feel it to be "your life's work".
2. Are you free from the need to be loved by everybody?
3. Do you avoid, or at least, never seek, fame, glory, honors, celebrity, popularity?
4. Are you attracted, rather than frightened by, mysteries, the unknown, the challenging?
5. Do you manage, somehow, to love the world as it is, whilst striving to improve it?
6. Are you well-aware of your advantages and good fortune?
7. Are you really open to life and to experience?