

Transcend

The New Science of Self-Actualization

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Self actualization

“Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What human beings can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization...It refers to man's desire for self-fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially.” - Abraham Maslow

Disintegration of the mind leads to personality development

The Polish psychiatrist Kazimierz Dabrowski argued that "positive disintegration" can be a growth-fostering experience. After studying a number of people with high psychological development, Dabrowski concluded that healthy personality development often requires the disintegration of the personality structure, which can temporarily lead to psychological tension, self-doubt, anxiety, and depression.

However, Dabrowski believed this process can lead to a deeper examination of what one could be and ultimately higher levels of personality development.' A key factor that allows us to turn adversity into advantage is the extent to which we fully explore our thoughts and feelings surrounding the event. Cognitive exploration—which can be defined as a general curiosity about information and a tendency toward complexity and flexibility in information processing—enables us to be curious about confusing situations, increasing the likelihood that we will find new meaning in the seemingly incomprehensible." To be sure, many of the steps that lead to growth after trauma go against our natural inclinations to avoid extremely uncomfortable emotions and thoughts. However, it's only through shedding our natural defense mechanisms and approaching the discomfort head on, viewing everything as fodder for growth, that we can start to embrace the inevitable paradoxes of life and come to a more nuanced view of reality.

Building your own moral compass

The hallmark characteristic of the self-actualizing person may be the ability to strive for a purpose that will make one unpopular with the neighboring environment, particularly if the environment is unhealthy, hostile, or dangerous.. As Erich Fromm noted, to be sane in an insane society is in itself a marker of insanity! Maslow echoed this sentiment in the introduction to *Toward a Psychology of Being*:

“Does sickness mean having symptoms? I maintain now that sickness might consist of not having symptoms when you should. Does health mean being symptom-free? I deny it. Which of

the Nazis at Auschwitz or Dachau were healthy? Those with stricken conscience or those with a nice, clear, happy conscience? Was it possible for a profoundly human person not to feel conflict, suffering, depression, rage, etc.?.“

Maslow argued for getting in touch with your "intrinsic conscience," one based upon the accurate perception of your own nature, destiny, capacities, and calling in life.

Working with purpose

For most of us, the greatest source of growth, energy, and wholeness comes about when our agentic drive to realize the deepest part of us is harmoniously integrated with our drive to have a positive effect on others - whether it's through mastering a craft, giving birth to an artistic creation, inspiring leadership, or being involved in a humanitarian organization. We tend to be most happy, persistent, productive, and high-performing when we both feel self-determined and are motivated to make a positive impact. As Sheldon put it, "The happiest person is the person doing good stuff for good reasons."

Striving wisely

Striving wisely involves choosing overarching strivings that (a) really fit your deepest growth impulses, (b) feel enjoyable and are freely chosen, (c) help you move toward a future self that will continue to grow and contribute to society, and (d) are well integrated with your other strivings in life as well as your other basic needs. But striving wisely is just the first step. In order to experience the fully transformative benefits of satisfying the need for purpose, it's crucial to live your purpose. Wisely.

Transcendent experiences + ego death

The researchers define transcendent experiences as "transient mental states marked by decreased self-salience and increased feelings of connectedness." Further studies since Newberg's earlier work have confirmed that people reporting mystical and out-of-body experiences show decreases in activation of the superior and inferior parietal lobe, as well as the nearby temporo-parietal junction - a cluster of brain regions that represent self-other boundaries and egocentric spatial awareness. As Yaden and his colleagues note, "This line of reasoning emphasizes how most fears and anxieties come from the prospect of damage to one's physical or social self. Therefore, when the self temporarily disappears, so, too, may some of these fears and anxieties." At its most extreme, transcendence is a feeling of complete unity with everything ("Absolute Unitary Being"), including other humans (the social environment), as well as all of existence, nature, and the cosmos (the spatial environment).

Psychedelics + peak-experiences

It may be that these drugs [especially LSD and psilocybin] . . . could be used to produce a peak-experience, with core-religious revelation, in non-peakers, thus bridging the chasm between these two separated halves of mankind. - Abraham Maslow, Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences (1964)

Healthy transcendence

I propose the following definition of healthy transcendence: **Healthy transcendence is an emergent phenomenon resulting from the harmonious integration of one's whole self in the service of cultivating the good society.** This view of transcendence, which I believe is the healthiest form of transcendence, is not about leaving any parts of ourselves or anyone else behind or singularly rising above the rest of humanity. Healthy transcendence is not about being outside of the whole, or feeling superior to the whole, but being a harmonious part of the whole of human existence. It's also not a level any human ever actually achieves, but it is a north star for all of humanity. In a nutshell: **healthy transcendence involves harnessing all that you are in the service of realizing the best version of yourself so you can help raise the bar for the whole of humanity.**

Self-actualization = a bridge to transcendent states of being

There are those among us who are consistently motivated by these higher values and higher experiences. For these "transcenders," **self-actualization is merely a bridge to transcendent states of being.** These transcenders show us what is possible in all of us and what we could become as a species.

Peak experiences show you what's possible

While peak experiences have immense transformative potential, anyone, regardless of their highest motivation in life, can undergo a peak experience (just as anyone, regardless of their highest motivation, can temporarily experience hunger, loneliness, or a blow to self-esteem). However, while many of the people he included under the umbrella of "self-actualizing people" were regularly motivated by health and growth, their highest motivation seemed to be a continual striving for transcendent experiences and transcendent values. Importantly, these people were not primarily motivated by happiness, and in fact many of them were continually frustrated as they struggled to realize their higher vision for humanity (visions that were often gleaned from peak experiences).

Transcenders work in service to others by transcending the ego

To Maslow, [transcenders] were people whose value system implied the "Bodhisattva path" to enlightenment—"that is, the helping service to humanity or the helping of other people . . . and of simply becoming better human beings for others, as well as for themselves, and finally of transcending the ego."

Going beyond the satisfaction of one's self

Maslow argued that the merely healthy fulfill the expectations of Douglas MacGregor's Theory Y: they are free of deficiency needs and are driven by the desire for actualization of their personal potential and development of their identity, individuality, and uniqueness. "Such people live in the world, coming to fulfillment in it," Maslow noted. "They master it, lead it, use it for good purposes, as (healthy) politicians or practical people do." While arguing that transcenders also fulfill the expectations of Theory Y, Maslow argued that they also transcend Theory Y, having more frequent "illuminations or insights or cognitions which changed their view of the world and

of themselves, perhaps occasionally, perhaps as a usual thing.” Maslow proposed that transcenders are “metamotivated” by higher ideals and values that go beyond the satisfaction of basic needs and the fulfillment of one’s unique self. These metamotivations include a devotion to a calling outside oneself, as well as a commitment to the ultimate values, or the B-values, the values of Being. Maslow’s list of B-values includes truth, goodness, beauty, justice, meaningfulness, playfulness, aliveness, uniqueness, excellence, simplicity, elegance, and wholeness.

Maslow observed that when he asked transcenders why they do what they do and what makes their life worth living, they often cited those values. There was no further reason why they devoted so much time to their work; the values were not in service of anything else, nor were they instrumental in achieving any other goal. When Maslow asked, “But why do you care about justice so much?” respondents would say something along the lines of “I just do.” Maslow believed that satisfaction of the “metaneeds” are necessary “to avoid illness and to achieve fullest humanness or growth. . . . They are worth living for and dying for. Contemplating them, or fusing with them gives the greatest joy that a human being is capable of.”

Sacredness

Transcenders can more easily live in both the D- and B-realms simultaneously because they can sacralize everybody so much more easily. The sacredness of every person and even of every living thing, even of nonliving things that are beautiful, etc., is so easily and directly perceived in its reality by every transcender that they can hardly forget it for a moment.

Transcenders find that increasing knowledge is associated with an increased sense of mystery, awe, humility, ultimate ignorance, reverence, and a sense of oblation. Most people pursue knowledge to lessen mystery and to reduce anxiety. But for peak experiencers and transcenders in particular, as well as for self-actualizers in general, mystery is attractive and challenging rather than frightening.

Healthy symptoms of frustrated idealism

Many transcenders who find themselves on the clinician’s couch show healthy symptoms of frustrated idealism that could be encouraged, rather than as something that needs to be medicated and cut off from the rest of their being. What many patients need is healthy integration of their “dark side,” not a cordoning off of their strongest potentialities.

Passing on the torch

In a journal entry on February 12, 1970, Maslow wrote, “I had thought that I’m at the peak of my powers & usefulness now, so whenever I die will be like chopping down a tree, leaving a whole crop of apples yet to be harvested. That would be sad. And yet acceptable. Because if life has been so rich, then hanging on to it would be greedy & ungrateful.”