**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the Idea of Always Becoming in Yoga Therapy**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a five-tier model of human needs usually depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Maslow (1943, 1954) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on.

From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. The first four levels are referred to as deficiency needs (*D-needs*), and the top level is known as growth or being needs (*B-needs*).

Deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the motivation to fulfill such needs becomes stronger the longer they are denied. For example, the longer a person goes without food, the hungrier they will become.

Maslow (1943) initially stated that individuals must satisfy lower level deficit needs before progressing on to higher level growth needs. He later clarified that satisfaction of a need is not “all-or-none” (1987). When a need has been 'more or less' satisfied it goes away, and our attention is directed towards meeting the next set of needs. Maslow noted that the order of needs might be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences. For example, he notes that for some individuals, the need for self-esteem is more important than the need for love. For others, the need for creative fulfillment may supersede even the most basic needs. Maslow (1987) also pointed out that most behavior is multi-motivated and noted that “any behavior tends to be determined by several or all of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them” (p. 71).

Once the needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization. He believed that every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization. Life circumstances usually have us moving back and forth between different types of needs.

Here are the original five levels of needs:

1. **Physiological needs** - these are biological requirements for human survival, e.g. air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, sleep. If these needs are not satisfied the human body cannot function optimally. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met.

2. **Safety and security needs** - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, freedom from fear.

3. **Love and belonging needs** - after physiological and safety needs have been fulfilled, the third level of human needs is social and involves feelings of belongingness. The need for interpersonal relationships motivates behavior. Examples include friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work).

4. **Self-esteem needs** - which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige). Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity.

5. **Self-actualization needs** - realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences. A desire “to become everything one is capable of becoming”(Maslow, 1987, p. 64).

Maslow's (1943, 1954) five-stage model has been expanded to include cognitive and aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1970a) and later transcendence needs (Maslow, 1970b). Changes to the original five-stage model are highlighted in the eight-stage model below; both were developed during the 1960's and 1970s.

1. *Biological and physiological needs* - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.

2. *Safety needs* - protection from elements, security, order, law, stability, etc.

3. *Love and belongingness needs* - friendship, intimacy, trust, and acceptance, receiving and giving affection and love. Affiliating, being part of a group (family, friends, work).

4. *Esteem needs* - which Maslow classified into two categories: (i) esteem for oneself (dignity, achievement, mastery, independence) and (ii) the desire for reputation or respect from others (e.g., status, prestige).

5. *Cognitive needs* - knowledge and understanding, curiosity, exploration, need for meaning and predictability.

*6. Aesthetic needs* - appreciation and search for beauty, balance, form, etc.

7. *Self-actualization needs* - realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.

8. *Transcendence needs* - A person is motivated by values which transcend beyond the personal self (e.g., mystical experiences and certain experiences with nature, aesthetic experiences, sexual experiences, service to others, the pursuit of science, religious faith, etc.).

Maslow (1943) like other humanists, for instance, Carol Rogers, focused on a more positive account of human behavior and was interested in human potential, and how it can be fulfilled. He believed people are motivated to seek fulfillment and that this leads ultimately to personal growth. He used the term, “self-actualization” to refer to the need for personal growth and discovery present throughout a person’s lifetime. Maslow felts a person is ‘always becoming' and is never static. In self-actualization, a person finds meaning to life that may be unique and important to them. Maslow: 'It refers to the person’s desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially.’

Maslow (1962) believed self-actualization could be measured through a person’s peak experiences. A peak experience occurs when a person directly experiences the world for what it is. Similar to yogic adepts’ accounts, there are commensurate feelings of euphoria, joy, and wonder with peak experience and are unique for each individual.

He was especially interested in the characteristics of people whom he considered to have achieved their potential as individuals. By studying 18 people he considered to be self-actualized (including Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein) Maslow (1970) identified 15 characteristics of a self-actualized person. Here are the characteristics he considered:

1. (They) perceive reality efficiently and can tolerate uncertainty

2. Accept themselves and others for what they are

3. Spontaneous in thought and action

4. Problem-centered (not self-centered)

5. Unusual sense of humor

6. Able to look at life objectively

7. Highly creative

8. Resistant to enculturation, but not purposely unconventional

9. Concerned for the welfare of humanity

10. Capable of deep appreciation of basic life-experience

11. Establish deep satisfying interpersonal relationships with a few people

12. Peak experiences

13. Need for privacy

14. Democratic attitudes

15. Strong moral/ethical standards.

Even though his method of asserting was unscientific, he did qualify these assertions by stating that to be self-actualized meant to reach full potential, not to be “perfect”. Also, he felt it is not necessary to display all 15 characteristics to become self-actualized, and not only self-actualized people will display them. He believed that less than two percent of the population achieve self-actualization.

Although Maslow asserted that self-actualization is attained by each person in their own way, he felt there were certain common characteristics of those achieving it. The characteristics are:

(a) Experiencing life like a child, with full absorption and concentration;

(b) Trying new things instead of sticking to safe paths;

(c) Listening to one’s own feelings in evaluating experiences instead of the voice of tradition, authority or the majority;

(d) Avoiding pretense ('game playing') and being honest;

(e) Being prepared to be unpopular if views do not coincide with those of the majority;

(f) Taking responsibility and working hard;

(g) Trying to identify defenses and having the courage to give them up.

While not identical to the yogic path or self-realization, the characteristics above do bring to the fore attributes one might find an a healthy, confident, independent person.

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