

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970)

Maslow was initially a behaviourist but after his first child was born, moved to psychoanalysis only to become disillusioned with its theory of motivation and so developed his own.

Known as **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**, his theory suggests that we have two quite different broad groups of needs:-

- a) needs relating to survival and focusing on deficiencies (**D-motives**)
- b) needs relating to psychological growth and focusing on becoming everything we are capable of becoming, being ourselves (**B-motives**)

More specifically, he stated that our actions are motivated in part by basic needs (D-motives_ such as food and safety and that these needs must be at least partly satisfied before More complex psychological needs (B-motives) influence our behaviour. This results in a hierarchy of needs with physiological needs at the bottom and needs linked more closely to life-experiences higher up.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



When food and safety are difficult to find, for example, Maslow suggests that beauty and understanding have little significance for us. The ultimate goal is *self-actualisation* or realising your full potential, attainable only when lower needs have been satisfied and it is in striving to reach this goal that we grow and develop as a person. As a point of evaluation of Maslow's theory, however, we can see that there are people who are motivated by higher needs even when lower needs are not secured, for example, a hunger striker, a rock climber, a refugee worker. Maslow might respond that lower needs only have to be partly satisfied and that these exemplars have at least sufficient food, security etc. for them to continue in their pursuit.

Maslow noted that not only are high-level needs characteristic of species which are more highly developed such as human beings, but also that as individual humans develop, we start to be motivated by higher needs. These higher needs or B-motives are often longer-term involving planning and a concept of the future. Having a concept of something existing in the future was seen by Maslow as a characteristic unique to humans and is a characteristic in which humans differ greatly from each other. It is no surprise then that whilst we all have *potential* to self-actualise, most of us do not or do so only to a limited extent. People Maslow considered to be self-actualised include Lincoln, Einstein, Spinoza, Eleanor Roosevelt, William James.

Maslow gives a list of **characteristics** shared by many self-actualisers:-

- perceive reality efficiently and can tolerate uncertainty
- accept self and others for what they are
- spontaneous in thought and action
- problem-centred (rather than self-centred)
- unusual sense of humour
- look at life objectively
- highly creative
- resistant to enculturation, though not purposely unconventional
- concerned for the welfare of humanity
- capable of deep appreciation of basic life-experiences
- establish deep, satisfying relationship with a few, rather than many, people
- need for privacy
- democratic

He also identified some **behaviours** which can lead to self-actualisation:-

- experiencing life as a child does, with full absorption and concentration
- trying new things, rather than sticking to old, safe paths
- listening to your own feelings rather than tradition or authority
- being honest and avoiding pretence or playing games with people
- being prepared to be unpopular
- assuming responsibility
- working hard
- trying to identify your defences and overcome them

Many people have moments of self-actualisation called **peak experiences** during which they are not striving, are perfectly content, relaxed and unconcerned for themselves.