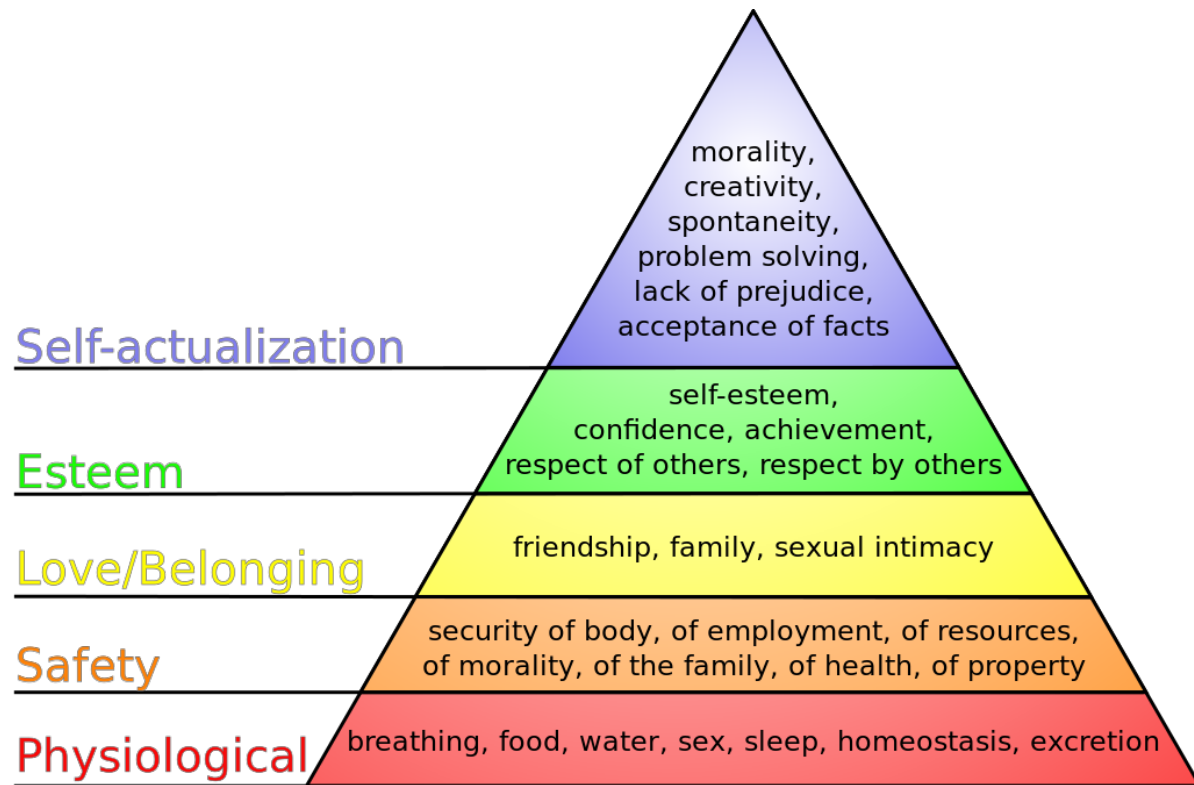


Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Or as I think of it, "One of the most misunderstood theories in all of education."

My aim in life is to help create a world which brings the most people possible onto the top "rung" on the ladder. Look at that description: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, acceptance of facts.

What could people possibly find objectionable about that?

Self-actualization is a noble and reasonable goal. It involves bringing the full expression of the self into the world. It happens once we are secure enough that we are willing and able to express our gifts. It's where we become confident enough to trust our own perceptions, but also humble enough to accept feedback and integrate new knowledge. It's where we can make our deepest contributions.

But I've heard some weird takes on it.

We live in a culture in which success is both lauded and criticized - sometimes by the very same people. Self-actualization is equated with greed and self-esteem with ego inflation. We are called greedy, self-serving, and demanding if we try to take up more space and do more with our lives.

But if we don't, we are called lazy. Damn.

As a result of this pull in opposite directions, a lot of people get caught on the lower rungs. Even when they have enough safety and security that they could focus on other things, they still keep trying to accumulate enough that they will *feel* secure. But a lot of forces conspire to keep them from feeling secure, not least among them, guilt over their relative fortune.

“What can I do with the resources that I have been entrusted?”

A huge part of my work is designed to help people come to terms with where they find themselves.

We are social beings in a complex power structure not of our own devising. But we are also agents in that structure, and the ways in which we navigate it and think about it directly impact the shape of the system.

Becoming conscious of this doesn't demand that we stop developing and growing, or even wanting things.

At no point did Maslow suggest that the bottom two steps on this pyramid are the only things that count as needs. In fact, our growth depends upon recognizing the point at which our basic needs are met, and giving ourselves permission to move beyond seeking social standing and towards a deep expression of our own understanding of reality.

When we are uncomfortable with the world we find ourselves in, we may find ourselves trying to deny our relative positions of fortune.

Instead of learning to ask, “What can I do with the resources that I have been entrusted?” we still want to act like life is just happening to us.

I know millionaires who still feel broke. They felt broke when they had less money, and they will still feel broke when they have more money, because they cannot bring themselves to say, “Wow. I'm really rich. What should I do next?”

Please don't hear me suggesting that this is your fault. Our economic and social systems encourage us to focus our energies on the lower levels, where we are still looking outside ourselves to see if we're doing OK. We are kept precarious by power structures that concentrate wealth and power and make us compete for access to the necessities of life.

But when we work with gratitude as a deep embrace of good fortune, we recognize that progress in material and social wealth comes with opportunities, both for our personal growth and also to give back.

The kind of growth I'm talking about is the kind that makes us into fully fledged adults.

When we are honest with ourselves, we become people who take responsibility for our actions, and take ownership of our goals and desires. We can only reach for self-actualization if we believe that we deserve it.

"Is this really about manifestation, and if so, can you use these techniques to become rich and famous?"

This is not manifestation in the way that you might be used to thinking about it. In my experience, leaning into your deep desires can result in eerie levels of coincidence and serendipity... but my goal is for you to focus on wholeness rather than external markers of success. If wholeness happens to result in fame and wealth, that's OK, but... it's probably not necessary.