

Maslow & The Pursuit Of Happiness

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Happiness, a feeling of great pleasure or content of mind, arising from satisfaction with one's circumstances or condition; also glad, pleased (Oxford English Dictionary).



Maslow wrote his paper "A theory of Human Motivation" (*Psychological Review*, 1943) to explain how individuals are motivated to meet their needs. The core theory, though frequently and robustly criticised, has largely stood the test of time in a period of extraordinary social, industrial, economic and political change and is a useful way to consider the idea of Happiness.

Let's briefly revisit the Theory; it states that there are five sets of fundamental needs which are set out in a distinct hierarchy. The needs are Physiological, Security, Love, Esteem (Cognitive and Aesthetic Needs) and Self-Actualisation.

Achieving these needs in a progressive order enables an individual to move on to the next need, which must be sated, prior to further progression. So, one starts with Physiological Needs which include life's basics such as food, warmth, shelter, air, water and so on. Maslow, interestingly, also included sex as a physiological need rather than an emotional or Love related need.

Safety needs kick in next; security (or indeed freedom) from war, family violence and, in a wider context, money and the security of a rewarded work source. The Theory then progresses on through Love and Esteem to Self-Actualisation.

One could argue that the Theory presents a logical pathway for an individual to follow to lead a full life.

But what about Happiness?

What light does the Theory shine on that?

If we start by looking at the foundation of the Theory, it makes sense that a person with food, water, shelter and fire will be “happier” than a person without these things. But one can also argue that neither might be happy, both are merely trying to survive and with, in this instance, differing degrees of success.

BUT, let's remember here that Maslow's Theory is, essentially, rooted in and about motivation. Yes, I wish to be happy but I also **need** to make changes in order to progress my life journey (so that I may self-actualise). Let's consider the relationship between self-actualisation and happiness.

It's acceptable to believe that anyone who has self-actualised can be considered happy. During their life they have acquired attributes to enable them to feel happy. They enjoy relative prosperity, safety, the comforts of love and belonging, respect of others and sense of belonging. There is no apparent obstacle to their state of happiness.





(Image credit – Wikipedia)

Maslow is therefore not giving us just a framework, but an actual roadmap to happiness. No one is born happy in the same way that no one is born sad. We assimilate the state and we strive to improve our life lot with the view to becoming more fulfilled and happier. This takes time and determination. A key dimension to life, everyone's life, is navigating our way through challenges, problems and worries.

In a nutshell this means we need to be adept at problem solving.

I have no money so I must get a rewarded job. I have no food so I must obtain nourishment.

This is categorically not the same as I have no money so I must start a multi-national company or, I have no food so I must establish a large farm. That's about ambition. With real life problems, the solutions rely on making small changes, often lots of small sequential changes. Collectively, these will help us fulfil our Maslovian destiny.

The challenge then, is the recognition of opportunity and identifying strategies to deliver on these opportunities through making changes. Knowing we have these important opportunities frequently translates into worries. Through inertia, or a lack of any considered idea how to address the challenges and opportunities, this may spiral. Self-actualisation is then further away.

How do we avoid this?

Accepting that Maslow provides a road map to happiness, it does have limitations and it cannot provide the exact route because everyone's journey is different. The exact route must come from the individual. Counselling is an option but it is expensive, not always convenient and not always available. Because of pressures on the public purse, it is invariably rationed and there is a waiting list. A long waiting list.

Fortunately, we can turn to technology to provide solutions.



The NoWorriesApp from NoWorriesApp.com is a free to download digital tool that enables users to recognise, manage and ease worries. The NoWorriesApp encourages users to contemplate their preeminent concerns and worries and record them in a worry log. What's really interesting is that a user's state of happiness is captured across ten dimensions ranging from Money to Relationships, Online Life, Environment, Work and so on. The unique *Happiness Tracker* graphically shows the user the positive impact of managing worry.

Having recorded a worry in the NoWorriesApp, the user then creates their own solutions that they can implement without feeling under any form of duress. The user is empowered to move only as fast as they wish. There is no “Do this” or “Do that” that so often comes from third party advice sources. Having established a habit of self-solving and self-managing the user emerges as more resilient and happier.

Self-actualisation, once further away, becomes that little bit closer.

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Happiness. Happiness is defined as being “Good fortune or luck in life or a particular affair, success or prosperity” and also as “The state of pleasurable content of mind which results from success or the attainment of what is considered good” (OUP OED 2nd Edition Volume 6 p1067).