

# **TOWARD A PSYCHOLOGY OF BEING**

*by Abraham H. Maslow*

*Summary & Worksheet*

## The Book In Three Or More Sentences:

A collection of lectures and scientific papers organized to answer a simple question: How does one achieve self-fulfillment? How can you satisfy your higher inner needs and reach the ultimate, final, state of affairs? In this book, professor Abraham Maslow shares in a relatively understandable language his study of human behavior and achieving psychological freedom.

## The Core Idea:

Here, in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Professor Maslow argues that most of us are preparing to live instead of actually living. Therefore, rather than Being a person who solely desires to reach his true “call” in life, you should enter a state of Becoming. Always trying to achieve your full potential and living in accordance with your natural needs.

### *Highlights:*

- *The sum of the negative and the positive things you hear about yourself molds the story you feed your mind with.*
- *After years of suppression, we create pseudo-selves that are designed to please others.*
- *To find who you are, to figure out what you're good at, you need to confront yourself. To focus on doing uncomfortable things.*

## 5 Key Lessons from Toward a Psychology of Being:

- *Lesson #1: The Net Results Of What You Register Becomes Your Reality*
- *Lesson #2: Fulfilling Your Basic Needs Will Motivate You To Achieve Even More*
- *Lesson #3: Fulfilling Your Basic Needs Will Make You Less Dependant*
- *Lesson #4: We Create Pseudo-Selves To Cope With The People Around*
- *Lesson #5: To Progress You Should Be Living, Not Preparing To Live*

### **Lesson #1: The Net Results Of What You Register Becomes Your Reality**

How to encourage your inner nature?

We need to learn more about our natural tendencies and desires. To learn what kind of person we are deep down.

This type of knowing what we are like, inside, will help us live to our ideal state.

Of course, this is not as easy as it sounds.

There are obstacles along the way. Boulders that are preventing us from becoming our most virtuous selves.

Most of these come from our surroundings and it happens subconsciously. When people correct us, highlight mostly our shortcomings from an early age, or we simply do things we're ashamed of, we start to believe that we're unworthy and unable to do virtuous things.

Karen Horney, a German psychoanalyst mentioned in the book, describes this unconscious gathering of outside comments with the word "registers."

When we receive positive feedback and when we do something good, this "registers" to our credit.

If we do something bad though, something we're ashamed of or simply others are calling us names, it "registers" to our discredit.

The net result becomes the story we tell ourselves. We either respect ourselves and we like who we are, or we despise our being and we feel worthless.

## **Lesson #2: Fulfilling Your Basic Needs Will Motivate You To Achieve Even More**

Ever wondered what makes people neurotic?

This is the short answer after grabbing the dictionary to translate some of the words inside the book: being deprived of certain needs.

The author calls this deficiency disease.

If you are continuously denied love, if safety is unstable, and relationships are scarce, you're most probably mentally damaged.

The solution to this troublesome psychological state comes when these deficiencies are eliminated.

Or in other words, if your most basic needs are satisfied, you'll be a healthy person. If they are always absent, this will lead to illness.

These seemingly unnotable desires have huge consequences on people. The author categorizes them as deficiency-needs versus growth-needs.

The difference between the two heavily influences how people do stuff. Especially how they act when they achieve goals, tasks, consume stuff, etc.

A person whose needs are not completely satisfied will be motivated to achieve something, or consume something, but his excitement will immediately plateau in the peak moment of success (a lot of times minor success) or consummation.

In contrast, a person who is rather satisfied won't be bothered after a task is done. His motivation will continue to grow. Or as the author writes, "there is no climax or consummation, no orgasmic moment, no end-state, even no goal if this be defined climactically."

His desire to keep on doing things will thrive. The more he gets, the more he will want. He is not so interested in achieving a specific goal,

his main desire is to behave towards continuous growth.

*“The behaving is itself the goal, and to differentiate the goal of growth from the instigation to growth is impossible. They too are the same.” Abraham H. Maslow*

### **Lesson #3: Fulfilling Your Basic Needs Will Make You Less Dependant**

Some things cannot be bought.

Being loved, to be respected by others, to feel safe in your own house and neighborhood. These things can be given to you only by outsiders. From people outside yourself. This neediness is making you somehow dependent on the environment.

This poor position means that you're not completely capable to function on your own. You're longing for others to come and make you whole. You must obey others, do as they wish. And not only, but you're also constantly alert of what others will do so you can adjust your behavior and change yourself to fit their desires.

This is not only tiring, it also instills feelings of fearfulness. The desire to make others happy, so you can also be happy, leads to a lack of freedom.

What can be done?

Achieving self-actualization. Total independence and self-governance.

Self-actualized people, such whose basic needs are all checked, barely need others to function. Quite the contrary, other individuals can actually slow their progress.

This unneedfulness is quite useful. These people don't need regular doses of reassurance from others and their desire to know themselves helps them understand what they really want from life.

And as the author writes:

*“Since they depend less on other people, they are less ambivalent about them, less anxious and also less hostile, less needful of their praise and their affection. They are less anxious for honors, prestige and rewards.” Abraham H. Maslow*

## Lesson #4: We Create Pseudo-Selves To Cope With The People Around

Part of us dies in our early childhood. And to be more precise, part of our inner self.

We're both the victims and the criminals.

We love our children, as our parents loved us, and hopefully still do, but we all want to force a change upon our little ones.

Admit it, you don't wholeheartedly accept your kid for himself, at least not 100%. There's always something your kid needs to change, "Be more politely!" "Say, thank you!" "Don't eat rocks." "Be more friendly" "Don't be so friendly."

When the above lines are regularly used, this is what happens in the mind of our kids: "Since what I do is unacceptable, then I, myself, am unacceptable."

*"Oh, they love' him, but they want him or force him or expect him to be different! Therefore he must be unacceptable." Abraham H. Maslow*

On the surface we want to help. We simply want our kids to behave and to be good citizens. Inside, though, the kid feels rejected and misunderstood.

His inner feelings don't matter to his parents, only his outside performance.

As soon as he realizes this, knowingly or unknowingly, a new self is formed – a pseudo-self.

A new persona that exists only to please the caregivers.

It's inevitable since the parents are needed for the kid to thrive. That's why it's vital for the kid to please them. After all, they are the ones satisfying his core needs: safety, food, love, respect.

We all create such pseudo-self. Another person who's polite and friendly. The guy who's always cheerful on the outside but never revealing what's on the inside.

The author calls this a defense mechanism against death. But it's also the machine of death.

Internally, we are torn apart. We so badly want to express our true desires but the years of disapproval prevent us from speaking up.

## **Lesson #5: To Progress You Should Be Living, Not Preparing To Live**

We're pulled in different directions. On one side, a force is pulling us towards safety. Out of fear, we don't do much to improve our current condition. We hold tight to our parents and we don't go outside without a helmet.

On the other side, we want to express ourselves. To show our true Self. The unconscious Self that's sometimes buried underneath layers of pseudo-selves initially created to survive among others.

This inner conflict is catastrophic for us.

Instead of living, we're preparing to live. We focus on Being someone, not on Becoming who we desire deep down.

To solve this dilemma, and to eradicate the desire for safety that's sabotaging you, you need to make progress seem more attractive.

Make the hard step forward more interesting, engaging.

This is not an easy task, though. It basically means that you'll constantly confront yourself. But that's what you need to do. To grow in a healthy way.

And that's not the only thing you will accomplish.

You will also answer a question of utter importance.

By doing uncomfortable things, you learn what you're good at. What you like and dislike. Your tastes. You'll also find your limits and realize what you're capable of doing. Or in the words of the writer, "this is the way in which we discover the Self and answer the ultimate questions Who am I? What am I?"

## Actionable Notes:

- Make change possible: We shouldn't force others to become what we want them to become – our kids, for example. We should only make it more possible for them to want it. As Abraham Maslow writes, “Only he can prefer it; no one can prefer it for him. If it is to become part of him, he must like it.” We can offer different experiences based on the long-term path we considered valuable for our kids but never force.
- Satisfy your lower needs first: As a child will not dare to move forward unless he feels safe, you also won't make progress until your lower needs aren't satisfied first – safety, love, food, shelter. Focus on gratifying these desires first. Often you can do both – work on your lower needs while also moving towards your higher needs. But that's only possible if you're getting a nice dosage of healthy encouragement from the people around.
- Find the inner self: Beneath the pseudo-self, the one you created so others can approve of you, hides the real self. You need to find it. To persuade it to show up. This won't happen until you're in a safe environment, though. Unless all of your basic needs are satisfied. If you want to uncover your real you, and to help others do the same, find a self place where you can observe your true desires and longings.
- Express your talents: What does it mean to function properly? To express yourself? You need to show your inner values to the world. As the heart in the human body must pump blood to “express itself,” an intelligent person must use his intelligence to feel complete. If you're a caring person you'll want to care for someone, otherwise, you'd feel empty and abandoned. The same applies to a musician. A guitar maestro will only feel himself when he's playing.
- Be a healthy chooser: The main difference between healthy and sick people is in the choices they make. By choosing only what's good for you, you're successfully extending the end date – the day you'll perish. In contrast, ill people, or should we say, unhealthy people, don't give much thought about what they select – the food they eat, how they manage their finances, etc. To be a good specimen of the human race, make sure to be a healthy chooser.

## Commentary and My Personal Takeaway

I will be honest. I did not understand some of the words used by the author. I'm not ashamed. After all, Abraham H. Maslow was named Chair of Psychology in 1951. Or simply put, he was a smart man. Theorist, psychologist, and keen observer of human behavior.



I'm saying this to warn you – the book is a mixture of profound revelations about our psychological needs and academic language that's oftentimes hard to grasp and contextualize.

Still, this shouldn't stop you from getting your hands on the book - *Toward a Psychology of Being*.

Inside you'll find intriguing concepts, mainly based on the author's personal observation and "bits of evidence," as stated by him, that aim to help you uncover your true self.

Finding self-actualization should be your top priority in life after having access to food and clean water. By doing so, you'll fulfill the greatest need in your life: understanding who you really are.

Key takeaway:

Live, don't prepare to live. Be spontaneous. Act with vigor. Focus on what you want from life, not what others want for you. Remove the mask you put, yourself, to please others. Show yourself to the world.

## **Notable Quotes:**

*"We can't force him to grow, we can only coax him to, make it more possible for him, in the trust that simply experiencing the new experience will make him prefer it. Only he can prefer it; no one can prefer it for him. If it is to become part of him, he must like it. If he doesn't, we must gracefully concede that it is not for him at this moment." Abraham H. Maslow*

*"An old-fashioned way of summarizing this is to say that man's higher nature rests upon man's lower nature, needing it as a foundation and collapsing without this foundation. That is, man's higher nature is inconceivable without a satisfied lower nature as a base. The best way to develop this higher nature is to fulfill and gratify the lower nature first. Furthermore, man's higher nature rests also on the existence of a good or fairly good environment, present and previous." Abraham H. Maslow*

*"I could describe self-actualization as a development of personality which frees the person from the deficiency problems of youth, and from the neurotic (or infantile, or fantasy, or unnecessary, or "unreal") problems of life, so that he is able to face, endure and*

*grapple with the “real” problems of life (the intrinsically and ultimately human problems, the unavoidable, the “existential” problems to which there is no perfect solution).” Abraham H. Maslow*

### *What to read next:*

- Actionable [Book Summary: The Evolving Self](#) by Robert Kegan
- Actionable [Book Summary: Anxiety](#) by Fritz Riemann
- Actionable [Book Summary: Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are](#) by Daniel Nettle

# INTERACTIVE SHEET FOR NOTE-TAKING

*Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below (just type inside the boxes) to outline your future steps:*

1. Don't force change. Think about what else can you offer to inspire change:

2. How do you behave around others? List all of your pseudo-selves:

3. How do you really want to behave? What is stopping you?

4. List the bad choices that are sabotaging you - how can you prevent them?

5. What do you really want to show/tell the world?

*Don't forget to save your changes.*