

## The nature of peak experiences

Peak experiences are described by Abraham Maslow as especially joyous and exciting moments in life, involving sudden feelings of intense happiness and well-being, wonder and awe, and possibly also involving an awareness of transcendental unity or knowledge of higher truth (as though perceiving the world from an altered, and often vastly profound and awe-inspiring perspective). They usually come on suddenly and are often inspired by deep meditation, intense feelings of love, exposure to great art or music, or the overwhelming beauty of nature.

Maslow (1970) describes how the peak experience tends to be uplifting and ego-transcending; it releases creative energies; it affirms the meaning and value of existence; it gives a sense of purpose to the individual; it gives a feeling of integration; it leaves a permanent mark on the individual, evidently changing them for the better. Peak experiences can be therapeutic in that they tend to increase the individual's free will, self-determination, creativity, and empathy. The highest peaks include "feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, and the loss of placing in time and space" (1970, p. 164). When peak experiences are especially powerful, the sense of self dissolves into an awareness of a greater unity.

Maslow claimed that all individuals are capable of peak experiences. Virtually everyone, he suggested, has a number of peak experiences in the course of their life, but often such experiences are taken for granted. In so-called "non-peakers", peak experiences are somehow resisted and suppressed. Maslow argued that peak experiences should be studied and cultivated, so that they can be introduced to those who have never had them or who resist them, providing them a route to achieve personal growth, integration, and fulfillment.