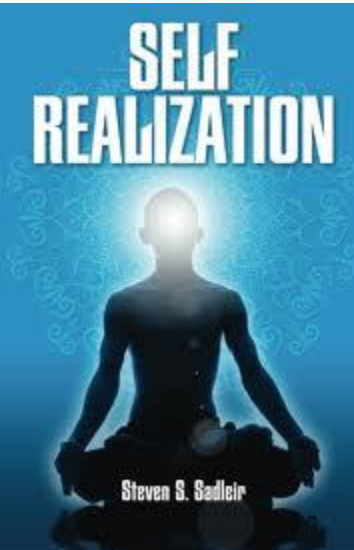
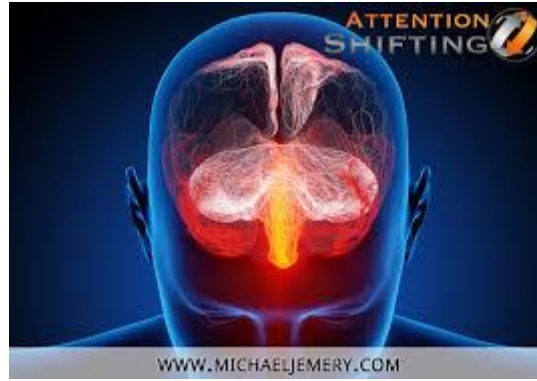


## SESSION 8



### THEORY OF Self-realization

### PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

**Self-realization** is an expression used in [psychology](#), [spirituality](#), and [Eastern](#) religions. It is defined as the "fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality."

In one overview, [Mortimer Adler](#) defines self-realization as freedom from external coercion, including cultural expectations, political and economic freedom, and the freedom from worldly attachments and desires etc.

***The Purpose of life is what you want to make out of it. Each of us has a unique purpose in life, and our happiness, growth and success lie in its realization. As humans, this purpose is to understand our relationship to a broader reality than our own - God-realization and realization of one's True Nature as Pure Consciousness.***

Have you ever asked yourself "Why am I here? What is my purpose in life?" "Is life more than just a brief span of time on earth?" Such questions have baffled the greatest thinkers and philosophers down through the ages. Living, in itself, is not enough. Life, in itself, is not the goal.

Most of us are so busy and caught up in day-to-day existence that we do not have time to think about the Purpose of Living. It seems that our lives revolve around daily routines and worldly demands rather than striving for fulfillment. Religions preach about true purpose and philosophers have pondered the mystery for centuries. While we mortals just try to live day-to-day, the eternal Purpose of Life still eludes us. All our pondering, technology and sophistication still haven't solved the fundamental riddle posed by two indelible facts of human existence - Life and Death. In this article, I will attempt to share with you my thoughts on the purpose of living.

We were all created to be happy and have purposeful lives. As human beings we are blessed with a brain and conscience; and so can decide what we want to make of our lives. Often, a purpose is imposed on an individual by family, culture, government, or even by individuals who seek to control others for their own satisfaction. As we strive to learn the purpose of our lives here on earth, we must remember that true fulfillment is not found in our outward achievements, but in what we accomplish within ourselves.

### **Why would I want to know my Purpose?**

What would you like to ask the Supreme Being if you could get a direct and immediate answer? A poll in *USA Today* reports that the #1 question people would like to ask God is "What's my purpose of Living?" According to Swami Rama, *"A human being is a citizen of two worlds, the world within and the world without are two entirely separate realities. The external world dissipates energy, but the internal world showers blessings that fill the vacuum created by the world. Conquering the inner world is more difficult than succeeding in the kingdom of life in the external world."*

Knowing your true purpose leads to real joy, satisfaction, and happiness as you strive to fulfill our dream life. Studies have shown that purpose-driven people experience more contentment, and have more success and financial rewards than most other people. By taking the time to understand your purpose in life, you'll have more satisfaction and more energy, and be more focused to achieve that Purpose. Until you find your Purpose and begin fulfilling it, you will never be truly happy.

### **Where Do I begin to find my Purpose?**

My incentive for knowing/finding my Purpose lies in my own future. My greatest satisfaction would be to look back on my life and know that I gave my all unselfishly to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate. From this point of view, nothing could be more important than finding and fulfilling my life's purpose.

But how and where can the purpose for your life be discovered? Our jobs, daily responsibilities, or even long-term goals are not the true Purpose, the real reason why we're here on earth. I believe that our most fundamental human desire is happiness. I also thought that happiness could be achieved through material possessions. I presumed that if I made enough money I would be happy and fulfilled. But it didn't work out that way. The more I followed the path of material possessions, the less satisfied I became. Consequently I no longer believe that materialism is the way to true fulfillment. I have learned that if you understand your Purpose and practice it in your daily living, God will give you what you want, and so make future steps easier and clearer.

On the other hand, many people believe that you have to give up all your worldly possessions and devote all your time to helping others, without regard for your own wants and needs. While such self sacrifice may be admirable, the most important thing to understand is that your Supreme Purpose cannot be found by searching outside yourself. To find your Purpose you need to search within yourself. Various meditation methods can help you to "look within" and realize your true purpose.

### **How to find your Purpose?**

To discover true purpose, one must first empty the mind of all the false intentions acquired in the course of daily living. We must understand that, while our present life and body will come to an end, whatever we do during our life influences our ultimate future. According to Eastern teachings, death is not the end of life. At death, we acquire a new body based on our previous activities (karma) and desires, being reincarnated as any of the 8.4 million species of life in any planet within the universe. This cycle of birth, death and transmigration

continues indefinitely. For humans there is a very special opportunity in this cycle because we are endowed with intelligence to inquire into the true purpose of life. Unless this milestone is reached, life is in vain.

We are eternal living beings - we are not this body but an eternal spirit soul. While the body will die, our real self, the spirit soul, will never succumb to death. The body is merely a temporary vessel, and when it becomes old or useless, the soul takes on a new body, much like a person changing clothes. Some view the prospect of death and changing bodies as unnatural, unpleasant and depressing. However, this notion fails to consider that the unpleasantness of birth, death, diseases, old age or other miseries of this world are due to having forgotten our real spiritual nature and relationship with God.

Accepting death will help with the realization that life is temporary, a journey of learning and growth that culminates in understanding that God, or the eternal Reality, is within you. Without this awareness our Purpose remains shrouded by body consciousness and ignorance, believing that life has no ultimate goal or meaning. But, as soon as we turn our attention back to God, this illusion is removed and we are free from fear. Achieving this level of enlightenment, however, is an arduous journey that must begin by examination of the inward self. Even Buddha spent years in solitude before realizing his Purpose, and Jesus went off into the desert to discover the truth.

## **Conclusion**

Finding the true purpose of life begins by understanding our real nature, transferring our earthly desires to spiritual, and turning our attention back to God. When we reestablish contact with God even ordinary activities and relationships we pursue take on new meaning and significance, no longer being temporary or illusory. Ultimately, it will enable us to go back to our eternal home. There we can forever engage in blissful loving service to the Supreme Lord, without being subjected to the stringent laws of birth, death, old age, disease and suffering.

Being human is a precious gift. Finding true purpose makes life more enjoyable. More importantly, the mind and spirit are infused with a mission and a direction. This Purpose attracts and causes more opportunities for fulfillment and enjoyment. Choosing a purpose to live by is important, critical even, to personal fulfillment and happiness.

Creating a purposeful life begins with changing your attitude and thoughts. Give thanks to God for what you have and, most of all, enjoy it! When you live life with purpose, giving to others without expecting anything in return, prosperity

will result. It took me a while to grasp this concept. But now, doing things for others unselfishly gives me a pure joy and true inner happiness.

Now let me tell you a secret of true happiness. When you wake up each day recite a little prayer of gratitude to the Lord for the immense pleasures of life and the opportunity to be of unselfish service to others. By doing so, your subconscious mind picks up the positive feeling and energy, and you will realize the purpose of your life. When you recognize your purpose you see things in a more positive way. This insight releases tremendous amounts of positive vibrations that, in turn attracts more positive energy. It all starts when you focus on the true purpose of your life, to liberate the soul and get redemption from the cycle of death and rebirth. Meditation is an extremely effective way of learning your true purpose.

**Finally, the purpose of life is to serve others, to realize the truth (Self) and to believe in Supreme Power.** It is for these, that this human life and this human birth have been received. Being human has given you a golden opportunity. Make the best use of it. When you are connected to your spiritual purpose your life becomes easier, and more satisfying and rewarding. Be generous and give yourself away, and serve humanity unselfishly. Live consciously and courageously, resonate with love and compassion to awaken the great spirits within others, and to leave this world in peace. All of us have been blessed with precious gifts by God. What really matters is what we do with these gifts during our lifetime. Ask yourself a simple question, what are you doing to help others? If you have found your Purpose, you will discover the answer (as I have) that the more you share your gifts unselfishly; God will shower you with more gifts in return.

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**Psychoanalytic theory** refers to the definition of personality organization and the dynamics of personality development that underlie and guide the psychoanalytic and [psychodynamic psychotherapy](#), called [psychoanalysis](#), a clinical method for treating [psychopathology](#). First laid out by [Sigmund Freud](#) in the late 19th century, psychoanalytic theory has undergone many refinements since his work. Psychoanalytic theory came to full prominence in the last third of the twentieth century as part of the flow of critical discourse regarding psychological treatments after the 1960s, long after Freud's death in 1939,<sup>[1]</sup> and its validity is now widely disputed or rejected. Freud had ceased his analysis of the brain and his physiological studies and shifted his focus to the study of the mind and the related psychological attributes making up the mind, and on treatment using [free association](#) and the phenomena of [transference](#). His study emphasized the recognition of childhood events that could potentially influence the mental functioning of adults. His examination of the genetic and then the

developmental aspects gave the psychoanalytic theory its characteristics.<sup>[6]</sup> Starting with his publication of [The Interpretation of Dreams](#) in 1899, his theories began to gain prominence.

## Definition

Through the scope of a psychoanalytic lens, humans are described as having sexual and aggressive drives. Psychoanalytic theorists believe that human behavior is deterministic. It is governed by irrational forces, and the unconscious, as well instinctual and biological drives. Due to this deterministic nature, psychoanalytic theorists do not believe in free will.<sup>[7]</sup>

## The Beginnings

Freud first began his studies on psychoanalysis and in collaboration with Dr. [Josef Breuer](#), especially when it came to the study on [Anna O.](#)<sup>[8]</sup> The relationship between Freud and Breuer was a mix of admiration and competition, based on the fact that they were working together on the Anna O. case and must balance two different ideas as to her diagnosis and treatment. Today, Breuer can be considered the grandfather of psychoanalysis.<sup>[9]</sup> Anna O. was subject to both physical and psychological disturbances, such as not being able to drink out of fear.<sup>[10]</sup> Breuer and Freud both found that hypnosis was a great help in discovering more about Anna O. and her treatment. The research and ideas behind the study on Anna O. was highly referenced in Freud's lectures on the origin and development of psychoanalysis.

These observations led Freud to theorize that the problems faced by hysterical patients could be associated to painful childhood experiences that could not be recalled. The influence of these lost memories shaped the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of patients. These studies contributed to the development of the psychoanalytic theory.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Personality Structure

Sigmund Freud determined that the personality consists of three different elements, the [id](#), the [ego](#) and the [superego](#). The id is the aspect of personality that is driven by internal and basic drives and needs. These are typically instinctual, such as hunger, thirst, and the drive for sex, or libido. The id acts in accordance with the [pleasure principle](#), in that it avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Due to the instinctual quality of the id, it is impulsive and often unaware of implications of actions. The [ego](#) is driven by reality principle. The ego works to balance both the id and superego. In order to balance these, it works to achieve the id's drive in the most realistic ways. It seeks to rationalize the id's instinct and please the drives that will benefit the individual in the long term. It

helps separate what is real, and realistic of our drives as well as being realistic about the standards that the superego sets for the individual. The [superego](#) is driven by morality principle. It acts in connection with the morality of higher thought and action. Instead of instinctively acting like the id, the superego works to act in socially acceptable ways. It employs morality, judging our sense of wrong and right and using guilt to encourage socially acceptable behavior.<sup>[7][12]</sup>

## **The Unconscious**

The [unconscious](#) is the portion of the mind of which a person is not aware. Freud said that it is the unconscious that exposes the true feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the individual. There are variety of psychoanalytic techniques used to access and understand the unconscious, ranging from methods like hypnosis, free association, dream analysis. Dreams allow us to explore the unconscious; according to Freud, they are "the 'royal road' to the unconscious".<sup>[13]</sup> Dreams are composed of [latent](#) and [manifest](#) content. Whereas latent content is the underlying meaning of a dream that may not be remembered when a person wakes up, manifest content is the content from the dream that a person remembers upon waking and can be analyzed by a psychoanalytic psychologist. Exploring and understanding the manifest content of dreams can inform the individual of complexes or disorders that may be under the surface of their personality. Dreams can provide access to the unconscious that is not easily accessible.<sup>[14]</sup> [Freudian slips](#) (also known as [parapraxes](#)) occurs when the ego and superego do not work properly, exposing the id and internal drives or wants. They are considered mistakes revealing the unconscious. Examples range from calling someone by the wrong name, misinterpreting a spoken or written word, or simply saying the wrong thing.<sup>[15]</sup>

## **Defense Mechanisms**

The ego balances the id, the superego and reality in order to maintain a healthy state of consciousness. It thus reacts to protect the individual from any stressors and anxiety by distorting reality. This prevents threatening unconscious thoughts and material from entering the consciousness. The different types of [defense mechanisms](#) are: [Repression](#), [reaction formation](#), [denial](#), [projection](#), [displacement](#), [sublimation](#), [regression](#), and [rationalization](#).<sup>[16]</sup>

## **Psychology theories**

### **Psychosexual development**

Freud's take on the development of the personality ([psyche](#)). It is a stage theory that believes progress occurs through stages as the libido is directed to different body parts. The different stages, listed in order of progression, are: Oral, Anal,

Phallic ([Oedipus complex](#)), Latency, Genital. The Genital stage is achieved if a person has met all of his or her needs throughout the other stages with enough available sexual energy. If the individual does not have his or her needs met in a given stage, he or she will become fixated, or "stuck" in that stage.

## Neo-analytic theory

Freud's theory and work with psychosexual development lead to Neo-Analytic/[Neo-Freudians](#) who also believed in the importance of the unconscious, dream interpretations, defense mechanisms and the integral influence childhood experiences but had objections to the theory as well. They do not support the idea that development of the personality stops at age 6, instead they believed development spreads across the lifespan. They extended Freud's work and encompassed more influence from the environment and the importance of conscious thought along with the unconscious. The most important theorists are [Erik Erikson](#) (Psychosocial Development), [Anna Freud](#), [Carl Jung](#), [Alfred Adler](#) and [Karen Horney](#), and including the school of [object relations](#).

## Critics of psychoanalytic theory

The Psychoanalytic approach has a variety of advantages and limitations that have spurred further research and expansion into the realm of personality development.

### Advantages

- The theory emphasizes the importance of childhood experiences.
- It initiated and addressed the importance of the unconscious, sexual and aggressive drives that make-up the majority of all human beings' personalities.<sup>[17]</sup>
- The approach also explains defense mechanisms and why every individual reacts differently to similar situations.

### Limits

- [Sigmund Freud](#) failed to include evidence of the impact of the environment on the individual throughout his theory.
- The theory is lacking in empirical data and too focused on [pathology](#).<sup>[18]</sup>
- This theory lacks consideration of culture and its influence on personality.<sup>[19][20]</sup>
- These limitations have led to the resolution that much of modern research does not support many of its notions.

## Psychoanalysis and aesthetics



Psychoanalytic theory is a major influence in [Continental philosophy](#) and in [aesthetics](#) in particular. Freud is considered to be a philosopher in some areas, and other philosophers, such as [Jacques Lacan](#), [Michel Foucault](#), and [Jacques Derrida](#) have written extensively on how psychoanalysis informs philosophical analysis.<sup>[21][22][23][24]</sup>

## **Psychoanalysis and literature**

When analysing literary texts, the psychoanalytic theory could be utilized to decipher or interpret the concealed meaning within a text, or to better understand the author's intentions. Through the analysis of motives, Freud's theory can be used to help clarify the meaning of the writing as well as the actions of the characters within the text.<sup>[25]</sup>

## **Eastern understanding**

### **Hinduism**

For the [Hindu](#) religion, self-realization ( [atma-jnana](#) ) is knowledge of the true self beyond both delusion and identification with material phenomena. It refers to self identification and not ego identification.

### **Advaita Vedanta**

The branch of [Advaita Vedanta](#) is the one that has particularly developed this concept.<sup>[2]</sup> According to [Vedanta](#), God as [Sat-Chit-Ananda](#) is perfect existence, consciousness, bliss. Whereas the manifest universe which is a play of [shakti](#) or energy is temporal, the immutable principle or reality is beyond time. God is not exactly a being - in order for there to be being, there has to be non-being - and, it is said, that such dualism within the differentiated reality does not exist in that state. It cannot be described, quantified, reasoned, or explained all of which exist on a differentiated basis only directly experienced as itself. Shakti or energy, as an abstraction, is eternal but its manifestations are continually changing. Therefore, in Hinduism, God is represented in both male and female form. The male as sat-chit-anand is immutable; the female shakti is temporal. While being omnipresent and immanent in reality, sat-chit-anand is formless. Shakti is manifested but, also, exists in an unexpressed form inside of sat-chit-anand. Therefore, even if the Universe ceases to exist at one point, it will eventually be reborn because Shakti in an immaterial form is also eternal. What motivates the action is described more poetically as a dance or a play.

Life begins with consciousness. What makes an ant different from a rock is some sense of itself. Rather than existing purely causally, it has some degree of freedom, but the grosser awareness is more causally bound. In its pure form as sat-chit-ananda, consciousness is said to be completely independent of causality. And therefore true freedom can only be realized in that state. Until then, the mind is bound to causal existence to greater and lesser extents. An awareness of self is present in grosser and subtler forms. Animals or even a microbe will have some form of awareness. However, in mankind, the ability to reason allows this base awareness to be refined into higher existential contemplation.

Vedanta describes the mind as being composed of sheaths or veils going from a gross awareness of self to a subtler awareness. Love - what we call love - is a very complex emotion described by as a feeling of empathy or compassion. The identification of one's self with others.

According to Vedanta, selfless love is actually an attribute of the self-realized. The mind shorn of its grossness is perfectly pure and, just like water poured from a jug into a pond mingles in an undifferentiated manner, so ultimately in [nirvikalpa samadhi](#) or enlightenment, there is a type of universal identification. This identification is not merely a delusion but actually a state of simultaneous experience. Yogis have described having a spherically expanding universal vision and a state of indescribable rapture. Scripture gives the metaphor of a voluminous lake overflowing with pure water. [Paramahansa Yogananda](#), in his book [Autobiography of a Yogi](#), describes this experience as realization of ever new joy. Self-realization is not easy to achieve and requires spiritual practice, sometimes over multiple life times.

One of the biggest reasons for this difficulty is that the thirst of the soul for material existence is not sated. Though realization is by far the greatest prize and the culmination of achievement, it is elusive. [Prarabdha karma](#), the force of accumulated metaphysical causality, the impulses whose imprints or [samskaras](#) are in the mind where the subtle most human desires are the yearnings of the soul. [Ramakrishna](#) said that God himself has become all these forms. It is not his will that the play should come to an end. That's why self-realization is not easily achieved. Saint [Jnaneshwar](#) said that the play existed for the sport of God. It was all his forms and manifestations.

The yearnings or desires cause the soul to seek out new manifestations. At death, though the gross body and senses die, the causality of those desires does not die. It seeks out a new corporeal existence. If the motive force is good, then the bound soul will go to any number of heavens; if the motive force is bad, it will go into any number of hells. The place where it goes is precisely motivated

by its own nature. Hell is a place where there is suffering and ignorance. Heaven is where there is pleasure or sensory enjoyment.

Neither residence in that heaven or hell, for the bound soul, is permanent. The soul ([atman](#)), while working off its previous [karma](#), continually acquires new karma. Like a metal hammered with new impressions, in the course of a life, the actions we reinforce shape the quality of the mind and the subtlest part of the mind is the soul. Therefore, it is conceivable that if someone continually acquired bad karma by reinforcing bad actions they would remain in hell for a very long time. However, the soul can always be redeemed because there is the power of free will or independence from causality that originates from God himself.

Good and evil is equivalent to knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge is good. Ignorance is evil. Ignorance leads to suffering and bondage. Knowledge to happiness and liberation. The highest heaven is said to be self-realization because that state is eternal, evernew, pure, perfect, and rapturous. Therefore, it is considered to be better than any sensual heaven, such as those in the realms of the gods.

Self-realization is said [\[who?\]](#) to be achieved through 4 types of spiritual practices.

- [Karma yoga](#) - without attachment to the fruit of action, acting by offering the fruit of the action to God. In other words, the practice of wholesome actions, actions that are complete, that fulfill all aspects of the present moment, leaving one in a state of fulfillment, i.e. free from desire, until the next impulse arises. All actions have a personal component which is unavoidable, be it pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. Wholesome, harmonious or in the flow actions are by definition fulfilling and therefore lead to Self Realization.
- [Raja yoga](#) - psychic control or one pointed meditation that first focuses thought onto one point and then stops thought leaving only the underlying awareness.
- [Bhakti yoga](#) - the development of love for God and other beings.
- [Jnana yoga](#) - reasoning the mind from gross most to subtle most state culminating in samadhi. This type of Jnana or knowledge is not exactly like book learning. Rather Jnana is discovering one's self and uncovering its mysteries through direct inner contemplation. Ultimately knowledge of relative phenomena dissolves and only the original Life-Force or God remains.

## **Ramana Maharshi**

As taught by [Ramana Maharshi](#), awareness or consciousness of "I am," plays a key role in achieving self-realization; tracing back to the source of awareness by

asking oneself the question "Who am I?", the true self becomes obvious. Focussing attention on the qualified "I am" is a powerful means to achieving the end which is being one with the completely unqualified "I," the True Self which is experienced as Silence.<sup>[3]</sup> Replacing the confused duality of Self and ego with the pristine non-dual experience of Self is the essence of Ramana's teaching.

True happiness is the manifested Self. It only seems like a result because it is not felt or known permanently before the ego is removed. As explained by Ramana Maharshi,

Happiness is inherent in man and is not due to external causes. One must realize himself in order to experience his unalloyed happiness. All spiritual scriptures are meant to make man retrace his steps to his original source.

Where are you now? Are you in the world or is the world within you? You must admit that the world is not perceived in your sleep although you cannot deny your existence then. The world appears when you wake up. So where is it? Clearly, the world is your thought. Thoughts are your projections. The "I" is first created and then the world. The world is created by the "I" which in its turn rises up from the self. The riddle of the creation of the world is thus solved if you solve the creation of "I". So I say, find yourself.

## **Sahaja Yoga**

The method of meditation Sahaja Yoga, created in 1970 by [Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi](#), defines self-realization as a connection with your self or the first encounter with reality.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Buddhism**

*Main article:* [Enlightenment in Buddhism](#)

Since [Buddhism](#) denies the existence of a separate self, as explicated in the teachings of [anatman](#) and [sunyata](#), self-realization is a *contradictio in terminis* for Buddhism. Though the [tathagatagarbha-teachings](#) seem to teach the existence of a separate self, they point to the inherent possibility of attaining [awakening](#), not to the existence of a separate self. The [dharmadhatu-teachings](#) make this even more clear: reality is an undivided whole; awakening is the realization of this whole.

## **Sikhism**

*Main article:* [Sikh philosophy](#)

[Sikhism](#) propounds the philosophy of Self-realization. This is possible by "aatam-cheennea"<sup>[5]</sup> or "Aap Pashaanae", purifying the self from the false ego:<sup>[6]</sup>

'Atam-cheene' is self analysis, which is gained by peeping into one's self in the light of the teachings of [Sri Guru Granth Sahib](#). It is the process of evaluating and analyzing oneself on the touchstone of 'naam simran' which if practiced, pierces into the self and washes it from within. The filth of too much of materialism goes, the self gets purified and the mind comes in 'charhdi kala/higher state of mind". This means that the self should be assessed, examined and purified, leading to self-realization and the purification of our mind. Once purified the mind helps in ushering in oneness with the Super Power as the Guru says, "Atam-cheen bhae nirankari" (SGGS:P. 415) which means that one gets attuned to the Formless Lord through self-realization. Indirectly it means that self-realization leads to God-realization.<sup>[7]</sup>

[Guru Nanak](#) says,

Those who realize their self get immersed into the Lord Himself.<sup>[8]</sup>

Guru Nanak also says,

He who realizes his self, comes to know the essence.<sup>[9]</sup>

## **Western understanding**

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines self-realization as:

Fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality.<sup>[11]</sup>

In the western world "self-realization" has gained great popularity. Influential in this popularity were psycho-analysis, humanistic psychology, the growing acquaintance with eastern religions, and the growing popularity of western [esotericism](#).

## **Psychoanalysis**

Though [Sigmund Freud](#) was skeptical of religion and esotericism, his theories have had a lasting influence on western thought and self-understanding. His notion of repressed memories, though based on false assumptions, has become part of western mainstream thinking.<sup>[10]</sup>

Freud's ideas were further developed by his students and neo-psycho-analysts. Especially [Carl Jung](#), Erik Erikson and [Winnicott](#) have been important in the

western understanding of the self. But also other alternatives have been developed.

Jung developed the notion of [individuation](#), the lifelong process in which the center of psychological life shifts from the ego to the self.

Erikson described human development throughout the life-span in his [theory of psychosocial development](#).

[Winnicott](#) developed the notion of the [true self](#).

Roberto Assagioli developed his approach of [Psychosynthesis](#), an original approach to psychology.

### **Humanistic psychology**

[Abraham Maslow](#) and [Carl Rogers](#), leaders in the [Humanistic Psychology movement](#), developed the concept of [self-actualization](#).

Based on Maslow, the most common meaning given to self-realization is that of psychological [growth](#). It represents the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being -for example, [ethical](#), [esthetic](#), and religious experiences and activities.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **Maslow**

Maslow defined self-actualization as:

The impulse to convert oneself into what one is capable of being.<sup>[12]</sup>

### **Eastern religions**

While the western knowledge of eastern spirituality is still growing, the understanding of these traditions is biased by western concepts.<sup>[13]</sup>

Aajit K. Das, in the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, compared and contrasted Maslow and Rogers' concept of self-actualization with the concept of self-realization in Vedantic Hinduism and the two major schools of Buddhism, [Theravada](#) and [Mahayana](#). The author concluded in this paper that the two concepts complement each other.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Western esotericism**

Western [esotericism](#) integrates a broad variety of traditions. It views self-realization as the ultimate goal of a human being, attaining permanent happiness and complete independence and [freedom](#) from all worldly bondage. In this view, true happiness is the result of self-realization

Self-actualization" represents a concept derived from Humanistic psychological theory and, specifically, from the theory created by Abraham Maslow. Self-actualization, according to Maslow, represents growth of an individual toward fulfillment of the highest needs; those for meaning in life, in particular. Carl Rogers also created a theory implicating a "growth potential" whose aim was to integrate congruently the "real self" and the "ideal self" thereby cultivating the emergence of the "fully functioning person". It was Maslow, however, who created a psychological hierarchy of needs, the fulfillment of which theoretically leads to a culmination of fulfillment of "being values", or the needs that are on the highest level of this hierarchy, representing meaning.

Maslow's hierarchy reflects a linear pattern of growth depicted in a direct pyramidal order of ascension. Moreover, he states that self-actualizing individuals are able to resolve dichotomies such as that reflected in the ultimate contrary of free-will and determinism. He also contends that self-actualizers are highly creative, psychologically robust individuals. It is argued herein that a dialectical transcendence of ascension toward self-actualization better describes this type of self-actualization, and even the mentally ill, whose psychopathology correlates with creativity, have the capacity to self-actualize.

Maslow's hierarchy is described as follows:

1. Physiological needs, such as needs for food, sleep and air.
2. Safety, or the needs for security and protection, especially those that emerge from social or political instability.
3. Belonging and love including, the needs of deficiency and selfish taking instead of giving, and unselfish love that is based upon growth rather than deficiency.
4. Needs for self-esteem, self-respect, and healthy, positive feelings derived from admiration.
5. And "being" needs concerning creative self-growth, engendered from fulfillment of potential and meaning in life.

Erikson created a theory of psychosocial dichotomies represented as "trust versus mistrust" and "autonomy versus shame and doubt", as examples. In terms

of Erikson's final stage of development, that of "ego integrity versus despair", the successful resolution of this stage corresponds with a sense of life's meaning. It is clear that the self-actualized person might be in danger of dying, but nevertheless may find meaning in life. This means that lower level needs might be unfulfilled even in situations represented by "being values", such as a sense of meaning in life. Note, however, that Maslow asserted that one's needs may be only partially fulfilled at any given moment.

Mahatma Gandhi, Viktor Frankl, and Nelson Mandela may serve as examples of people who each personify a reality self-actualization. At risk of his life, Mahatma Gandhi utilized civil disobedience for purposes of freedom, Viktor Frankl was a holocaust survivor who never relinquished his grasp of life's meaning, and Nelson Mandela maintained an attitude of meaning in life even while he was imprisoned. The safety needs of these individuals may have been threatened in these particular life circumstances, but it may be understood that many people whose safety needs are compromised may be cognizant of being values. They may find life to be meaningful explicitly because of situations of danger to their lives, situations represented by the dichotomy of life and death, in particular.

As indicated, Maslow identified self-actualizing people as individuals who are highly creative, who have peak experiences, and who are able to resolve the dichotomies inherent in opposite contraries such as those constituted by "freedom and determinism", "the conscious and the unconscious", as well as "intentionality and a lack of intentionality

Creativity, a hallmark of a self-actualizing person, may be perceived to reside within a dialectical relationship. While most dichotomies cannot be explicitly understood as resolvable, the above dichotomies can be seen to be resolved through creative activity. Using the one aspect of each of these dichotomies as a "thesis", and another as an "antithesis", art may represent the "synthesis" of the dichotomous relationship.

The dichotomy of freewill and determinism, because it relies on both freely willed and causal activity, is resolved by art in terms of both the artist's self-expression and the receiver of artistic expression, in that both of these individuals may be understood to utilize conscious and unconscious aspects of themselves in order for artistic expression and reception to ensue. The conscious and the unconscious parallel the free-will and determinism dichotomy, in that conscious action might be considered to be freely willed and unconscious action may be considered to rely largely on causality.

Another dichotomy that explicates the artistic process is a resolution of subject and object. The term "subject", indicating "the artist" may be indicative of "the



self", and the term "object" may describe "the other" or "the audience". Through art, there is a joining of the self and the other, a communication between the two. This is accomplished by the artist's use of metaphor and allegory that allows for free expression that may culminate in a communication with the audience by the artist and what may be described as a communicative function within the artist himself. Essentially, art may culminate in dialogue between the artist and the audience, or self-dialogue and self-realization within the artist. Peak experiences, described as epiphanies, are also realized by both the subject and the object through art. Art, more than any other type of communication, is perhaps the least dogmatic, even if it is indefinite. This is true for all forms of art. Art may only be understood when it is interpreted by the self or the other, and this is accomplished by both the artist and his audience.

The mentally ill poet, Sylvia Plath, may be said to have realized an epiphany when she described the birth of her child in the poem, "Morning Song". In this poem, she stated:

I'm no more your mother

Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow

Effacement at the wind's hand.

Through unique and innovative language, she described her own peak experience. It is, then, the creative communication between herself and her audience and that epiphany within herself that allowed her to achieve that moment of self-actualization. As stated, Plath was known to suffer from mental illness, and she may not be readily understood that be a self-actualizing individual. Nevertheless, deconstruction and reconstruction of the self becomes a possibility through poetic self-expression, resultant epiphanies and recognition of an evolving self that is characterized by self-actualization. Metaphor and allegory, as used in artistic expression, can be utilized to create self-permeable boundaries that are nevertheless intact, for both the artist and his audience.

Self-actualization through art may enhance the psychological well-being of the individual. Interpretation of art, on the part of both the artist and the audience, becomes an avenue toward self-realization, perhaps of an idiosyncratic and subjective nature, yet it is self-realization. And self-realization is self-actualization. It has been suggested that it is only the most functional people who are able to achieve being values, resolution of dichotomies, peak experiences and meaning in life. It is contended that self-actualization is a possibility for all creative individuals. More or less, we are all creative.

The concept of **self-realization** has become very popular since the founding of [Self-Realization Fellowship](#) by [Paramahansa Yogananda](#). But what does it really mean when we talk about self-realization?

The Webster's Dictionary defines self-realizationism as:

"The ethical theory that the highest good for man consists in realizing or fulfilling himself usually on the assumption that he has certain inborn abilities constituting his real or ideal self."

Further, Webster's defines self-realization as:

"The fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality."

However, such Dictionary explanations are not really very enlightening for anyone on the spiritual path. This is not really surprising, since the scholarly interpretation of what constitutes the Self is not on the same level as the interpretations of our Philosophers. While dictionaries normally refer to the entire person, the individual, or to a person in his best normal physical and mental condition, **Philosophers refer to the Self as pure Consciousness, pure Awareness, pure Beingness, Atman, or even God.** Philosophers have mentioned the act of self-realization for centuries. [Ramana Maharshi](#) talked about it and [Shankara](#) before him.

Most of us identify the Self with body and mind and therefore find it difficult to equate God with the Self. Simply equating God with the Self can sound like sacrilege or the product of a megalomaniac. But when the Self is explained as pure Awareness, which means without thought and without individual identification (ego) of any kind, then it is clear that megalomania and sacrilege is not really an option because that would require an ego. Understanding the Self as pure Awareness brings us closer to the understanding of self-realization. If the Self is pure Awareness, then all we have to do to realize the Self is to quiet our thinking. Where there is no thinking, there is no ego. Where there is no ego, there is the Self. After all, we do not really cease to exist when we cease to think.

This condition of being aware of one's Self reveals one's own eternal Being. Since God is pure Awareness and our Self is pure Awareness, the two really compare as the water drop compares to the large body of water. Thus, while it is not correct to say the Self is God, it is correct to say that the Self has the same qualities as God and is in no way different. **God and the Self can only be understood as omnipresent Awareness.**

Since the Self is already there at the center of our Being, **Self-awareness** is actually a more correct term than self-realization because realization implies a first Self that could realize another, second Self. However, there is only one Self and to realize the Self means to BE that Self. Only the ego can speak of realizing the Self but only the Self can be the Self. The trick lies in distinguishing the Real

(the Self) from the unreal (the ego) and that is accomplished entirely by moving our attention away from the unreal and keeping it focused on the Real, the experience of I-AM.

Because we all erroneously identify with the ego, or the combination of body and mind, all efforts to realize the Self are falsely felt as an attempt of self-destruction. For that reason, in his "[Autobiography of a Yogi](#)" Paramahansa Yogananda quoted both [Shankara](#) and [Ramana Maharshi](#).  
Shankara: "**Knowledge cannot spring up by any other means than the inquiry: Who am**