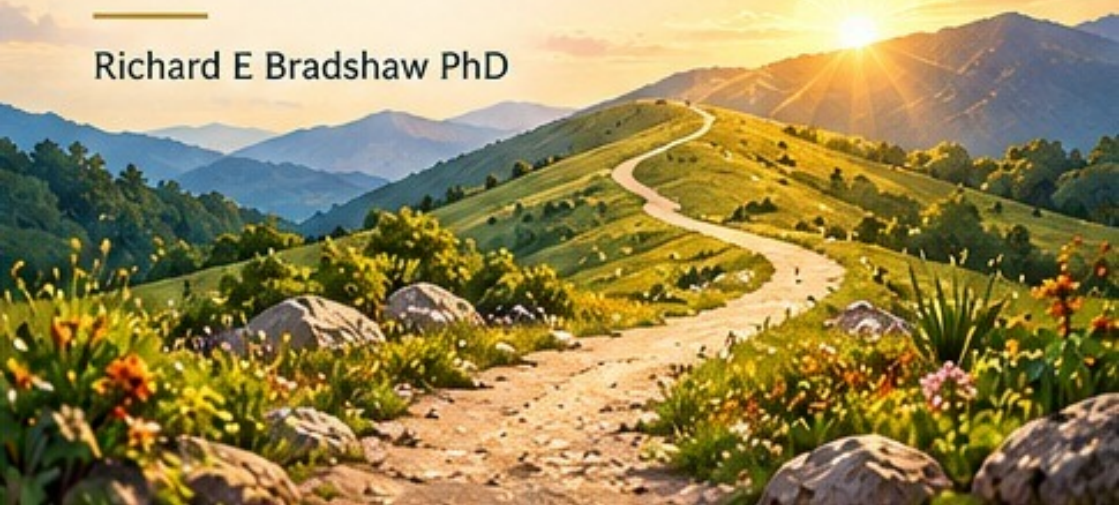


The Art of Self-Actualization

Richard E Bradshaw PhD



There are two temporal levels to self-actualization. The overview level is where you project into the future and decide the kind of person, the talents, achievements, and goals you want for yourself. This level concerns the what of self-actualization: self-esteem, contentment, a sense of safety in who you're becoming.

The second level is more immediate and, in the end, more important: the how of self-actualization. Where the first is a vision, the second is a strategy, one that requires constant attention. This is where the real change happens, moment by moment, day by day, and it takes effort because the self is conditional by nature, shaped by habit, belief, and the expectations your own conditioning predicts. That conditioning creates mental boundaries that resist change, even while change is exactly what you are trying to bring about. Inside this sea of habituation, you have to actively navigate toward newer, more expansive states of awareness.

This requires an immediate kind of focused awareness. Within each moment that comes along, filled with who you are at that present instant, lies the key to specific aspects of your identity. That sounds obvious. Who you are at any one moment is who you are. But how many of us actually notice who we are being from one moment to the next, as differing moods and outside events reshape the content of our awareness? By carefully observing each of these personality moments, you come to know yourself more fully, and in knowing yourself, you begin to see how and why you might want to change.

There is a constant screening process happening within you, orchestrated by mind and emotion, a kind of ongoing rationalization in which you interpret the qualities of each character moment in terms of how you wish to see yourself. The fluctuating result of that screening shows up as experience within your awareness, and that experience is what you know as me. Consciousness expands or contracts depending on the valence of that experience. Expansion feels like increased well-being, levity, and openness to the world. Contraction feels like a closing up, a diminished awareness, a smaller version of yourself. In expansion is found real freedom. In contraction is found a prison of your own making. The art of self-actualization is the art of expansion: taking whatever a moment offers and using it to become more open, more engaged with the life around you.

As you engage more deeply with your environment, you may find life where you once thought there was none. By approaching people and experiences without expectation, you begin to perceive them unrestrictedly, letting them fill you with their real essence rather than the essence you had already imposed on them through your own conditioning. In knowing others more deeply, you expand yourself. This is what human beings have been doing since the beginning of our existence, reaching out with perception and absorbing something of what we encounter into our own nature. At first this happens automatically. As we grow more skilled

at being human, it becomes intentional, a strategy for becoming more expansive inside, and the tool by which we fulfill our greatest aspirations physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. May you expand forever. Remember, the only real constraints on consciousness are self-imposed.

For further insights into the self and self-actualization, see *Freedom: What It Is and How to Achieve It*.

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