Abraham Maslow was a Yogi in the garb of a Western Jew. He was truly the embodiment of his name, in the historical sense: A Brahmin. He lived a clean, cheery, jolly life and was a boon to all he associated with. A world famous psychologist, he mastered human psychology and lived that mastery. Swami Gitananda, who during his Grihastha days in Canada, often travelled the Lecture Circuit speaking on psychology, medicine and Hindu culture, was fortunate on one tour to be paired with this remarkable man. Swamiji, then known as Dr. Ananda Bhavanani, impressed by the joviality and goodwill which Maslow radiated, asked him: “Abe! How do you remain so constantly cheerful and positive”. Abe sat thoughtfully, pondering the depths of his coffee cup. “You know, Ananda”, he replied, “I have created this semi-permeable membrane around myself. This membrane acts as a filter, allowing only happy, cheerful people, situations and thoughts into my inner space. This keeps negative elements at an arm’s length!” Swamiji chuckled: “You know Abe! That sounds like you have what we call in Yoga – a powerful, protective, highly charged Pranamaya Kosha or Energy Body!”. “Perhaps I do”, the great psychologist said. “Protection and discrimination by any other name still fits the bill!”

Maslow preached over and over the need for self-actualization in everyone’s life. His famous dictum: “What a man can be, he must be” has called many a soul to make greater effort in his/her aim to live a meaningful life. He evolved an eloquent system of thought which provided a “blueprint for successful living” which he called “The Hierarchy of Needs”. His system bears a strong resemblance to both the idea of Chatur Purushartha and the concept of Prakrithi, Samskrithi and Vikrithi in the Yogic-Hindu world view.

Basically Maslow’s idea is this: Man has a hierarchy of needs ranging from the lowest biological needs for food and sex, to the higher needs of emotional and intellectual fulfillment. Finally, the highest need of all he called as “self actualization”, when the aspirant becomes his full potential. Maslow said that one had to fulfill oneself on each lower level, before one could aspire to fulfillment at the highest levels.

The Yoga Darshan views three possibilities in the development of human nature: Prakrithi, Samskrithi and Vikrithi. Prakrithi is those needs which are basic to one’s existence in the human body: food, sex, emotional fulfillment, sleep, safety, security, enjoyment – play, companionship, community acceptance and material accomplishment. These are legitimate needs which should not be suppressed, but rather must be fulfilled. However, and here is where the Yogic scriptures give clear guidelines: all these “Needs of Prakrithi” must be fulfilled within the ambit or limits of Dharma. The Yogic system postulates that Dharma or self-ordained duty and responsibility is the bedrock of all fulfillment. Dharma is that which brings stability,
harmony and integrity. It is the conscious choice of the right thought, right word and right action at the right time, the right place and in the right manner. In another specifically Yogic view, the needs must be fulfilled within the limits of the Yama-Niyama or the code of conduct of Patanjali’s Yoga system.

One may also examine the fulfillment of needs in the framework of the Chatur Purushartha, or the Four Noble Aims of life. The first Noble Aim is the fulfillment of Dharma, one’s duty in life. The second is Kama, sexual and emotional fulfillment, which is a genuine need of Prakrithi. Kama is the second of the Chatur Purushartha. Artha, the desire for material possessions, security and comfort is the third of the Purushartha, and is also a legitimate need. But, the sages remind us that this fulfillment of the requirements of Prakrithi (Kama and Artha) must be undertaken within the structure of Dharma, or righteous living, right-use-ness. Dharma is that action, thought, word or deed which creates harmony, stability and integrity for all concerned. Thus, fulfillment of basic needs must be undertaken within the restraints of morality and ethics (Dharma-Yama-Niyama). Then, one does not lose what one has gained. Santhosan (contentment – fulfillment) is a natural outcome. One is satisfied. The need is fulfilled. One has enough and knows that one has enough.

Once the demands of Prakrithi are satiated, then it is possible to refine, and beautify one’s life style. One “moves up the hierarchy of needs” (in Maslow’s terms) from the urgency of animal desires to a stage in which one can enjoy fulfillment of artistic, intellectual needs, creative expression and beauty. After fulfilling the biological needs of Prakrithi, one proceeds up the ladder to fulfill emotional, intellectual and aesthetic needs which in Sanskrit is called Samskrithi. Samskrithi is sometimes defined

Reproduced from Yoga Life, the International Monthly Journal of ICYER at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, India. www.rishiculture.org
as "culture" or a refinement of the fulfillment of needs and desires. A starving man does not care what his food looks like or how it is prepared. He simply is desperate to release the terrible pangs of hunger. But a well-fed man will wish to “dine in style” with beautiful dishes, choice morsels aesthetically prepared, and a soothing ambience. This “aesthetic, refined and restrained life style” is called Samskrithi. This can also be defined as “culture”. The Prakrithi is satisfied through Samskrithi. Kama is fulfilled in an aesthetic, cultured atmosphere. Artha is satisfied in a controlled, refined, conscious manner. This edifice rests on Dharma – Eternal Virtue. That which was good, is good, will always be good is Dharma. Without Dharma as a basis, the fulfillment of Prakrithi becomes Vikrithi, or perversion. Perversion is rampant in modern times – the sexual drive is highly perverted in every way, wantonly vulgarized and indulged in without restraint. Food habits are perverted with junk food remaining at the top of the food chain and indulgence in poor dietary habits which defy the normal need of nourishment. When the basic needs are not fulfilled within the restraints of Dharma, they become perverted and result in the destruction of the individual, rather than his/her fulfillment. This is Vikrithi.

What Maslow called “Self-Actualization” was the summit of his Hierarchy of Needs. This peak experience was called by the Rishis as “Moksha”. Moksha is the Ultimate Self-Actualization, in which the individual makes “Real” (Realization) his true identity which is “One-ness with the Divine”. The small self (ego) realizes the Great Truth, which is that it is one with the Big Self (Atma-Purusha). In that realization lies the ultimate sense of freedom (Moksha) and Bliss (Anandam). The potentiality in every human to realise his true Divine nature, becomes an actuality. Or in the words of Maslow, what man can be (Divine) he must be!