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## Peaker

**Peaker: a strong positive experience in early life, which sets up a predisposition to pleasure in particular circumstance or to pleasure in general. Derivation obscure. Poss. Abraham Maslow: Peak-experience; Fr. pic-haut?**

This definition is not in any dictionary yet. Partly because I only made up the word peaker a few minutes ago. What I did not make up was the experience of peakers. And if you are together enough to be reading this piece, my guess is that you have had a few peakers in your time. All that was missing was a single word to represent them.

It seems to me that having a clear word for something makes it easier to deal with that concept. Take hang-up. Till that word came along, people only had phases like Neurotic Tendency, to describe such difficulties. Somehow it seems more acceptable to have hang-ups than to have neurotics tendencies; so now many people seem to me to be almost boringly fluent in explaining how hung up they are.

I would like to make it easy for people to be at least as aware of the patterns of their experience that predispose them to joy; to being turned on. Two experiences in my own life are in my mind as I write this, and they are the reality I can set beside Maslow's notion of peak-experience and my understanding of the long-term effects of what I shall now call a peaker.

The first peaker set me writing this, in the middle of an 8-hour night-flight. I wrote, lying across two seats wrapped in a cellular blanket. I was warm and beatifically happy. The reasoner in me began an internal monologue about the large sum of money it would have cost me to pay for both the seats I was using; but my pleasure was not explained away by such thoughts. I was in a state I somehow recognised from before. But how? Juddering along on a slightly bumpy flight, 33,000 feet up, in the dark? I knew very well that this was a new experience. Then gradually, not by reasoning, but by sinking into recognising, I was in touch with the peaker.

When I was little, my father used to wrap me in a blanket and put me to sleep on the back seat of the car when he and my mother were going to see friends for the evening. In my rickety and insecure life, this sort of outing nourished me in many ways. My father and mother were visible, both there, and in a good mood. I was not left out. I was looked after. All these good feelings had modulated to this curious happiness at being squashed in on two seats of an aeroplane.

Now that is, apparently at least, a small and a highly specific peaker, re-activated only by night-flights in half-empty juddery planes. The other one I am going to recount has more obvious connections with a good deal of later behaviour.

I was working with John Southgate on a way into self-analysis. To describe it briefly we were taking turns at doing some recalling of early memories, then some body-work and deep breathing, followed by free association. Our expectation was that this might lead to the re-living of painful memories, and some abreaction. (It did). But during my

turn, I found myself unexpectedly in the midst of what I will now call a peaker. I was lying still and found myself suffused with warmth and a vast egocentric satisfaction. The conceit in the phrase 'L'état c'est moi' is no more than a pale shadow of the huge delighted arrogance and peace of that re-visited peaker.

I lay there, hot and belly-distended, more powerful than any dictator, more gloriously sated than any shah in his harem: milk-full, throbbing, untroubled by the slightest inkling that the universe might have departments unoccupied by my smug consciousness. I was back in the post-prandial bliss of early infancy. I/the world was good; in harmony; within my control.

Since then I have felt there to be a strong connection between the largeness of that early experience and my tendency to eat my way through trouble and anxiety, most of my life. It was as if I said to myself 'The path to joy is to be full of milk. The way to get the world in harmony and under control is to eat it.' In other words, I acted as if eating was a ritual, an act of magic, to change my whole way of perceiving. The fact that it never worked was not enough to change this patterned solution to painful experience.

It took the re-living of the peaker to do that, to make me see that the central issue was not the act of taking in food or not taking in food. The central issue was my wanting to experience delight and satisfaction by vigorous attempts at getting the world on my terms. This is a clumsy phrase; but I am trying to relate my meaning back to the peaker. My world is very small. Having it on my terms does not, to me, mean being on a power-trip. It means being fully extended, being in touch with my energy, trusting it and using it, to a great extent to energise other people and try to move them into their freedom. All of which has precious little to do with eating, which has stopped being a hang-up for me to the extent that I weigh sixteen pounds less now than I have for the past many years.

Out of the many peakers I could quote, I chose this last one both because it was a strong and central experience, and because it illustrates how peakers and hang-ups can sometimes be related. To make an image: the peaker is like a beautiful place I have enjoyed. That is a rich experience, to know the reality, and thence the possibility of large enjoyment. But it can be very inappropriate to try and take the same path to that beautiful place when I am grown-up, as when I was a baby. In fact, to extend the image, the beautiful place is certainly there; that is the life-long predisposition to pleasure it gives. But places change as the years go by, as much as the ways to travel to them change.

By plane instead of by car, for example!

A peaker is a very important experience. I hope that you can be in touch with your own, maybe by closing your eyes now and just reaching back; or by being more fully aware of joyful moments of all the strands of feeling in you; or by deliberate work in co-counselling or however. What happens for me and what I should like to happen for you is that working through old pain tends to dispel it. Working through old pleasure reinforces it.