



# From Maslow to Barrett

## Overview of the Origins of the Seven Levels of Consciousness Model

**By Richard Barrett**

The reason I created the Seven Levels of Consciousness model was to give greater definition and understanding of human motivations. The model is based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

It was clear to me that Maslow's research and thinking was ahead of his time. Abraham Maslow died in 1970 at age 62 well before the consciousness movement had taken root. I saw that with some minor changes Maslow's Hierarchy could be transposed into a framework of consciousness. In 1996, I set about making these changes by shifting the model of the Hierarchy of Needs into the model of the Seven Levels of Consciousness.

### **Changing from needs to consciousness**

It was evident to me that when people have underlying anxieties or subconscious fears about one of their lower order deficiency needs, their subconscious remains focused on that need. They simply cannot get enough of what they need to assuage their anxiety or subconscious fears, even though it would appear to an outside observer that they have satisfied that need. For example, there are people who are never satisfied with the amount of money they earn. Even though they may be very rich, for them, that need remains unfulfilled. No matter how much they earn, they are always left wanting more. Such people remain subconsciously focused at the Survival level of consciousness even though they may have mastered several of the other higher levels of consciousness.

Other people, who have underlying anxieties or subconscious fears about belonging or being loved, subconsciously operate from the level of Relationship Consciousness. They have such a strong need to experience a feeling of affiliation that they may compromise their own integrity to get that need meet. They want to be liked. They

cannot tolerate conflict and will use humour to bring harmony and mask their true feelings.

Individuals, who have underlying anxieties or fears about their performance or ranking in relation to their peers, subconsciously operate from the level of Self-esteem Consciousness. Their need for power, authority, status, or respect is paramount for their well-being. They can never get enough recognition, praise or acknowledgement. They become perfectionists, workaholics and over achievers. They are driven by their need to be recognised. Despite all the accolades they may get, they always want more fame, recognition, power, authority, or status.

These considerations led me to recognise that *our perceived needs are in reality a reflection of our consciousness, and what we value, consciously or sub-consciously, is reflected in the levels of consciousness from which we operate.*

### **Expanding the concept of self-actualisation**

I expanded the concept of self-actualisation to give more definition to our mental and spiritual needs by integrating the levels of consciousness described in Vedic Science into the Seven Levels of Consciousness model.

Vedic science specifies seven levels of consciousness. These are waking, sleeping, dreaming, soul consciousness, cosmic consciousness, God consciousness and unity consciousness. It appeared to me that the descriptions of the last four of these levels of consciousness described the underlying features of self-actualisation.

**The First Level of Self-actualisation:** My first realisation was that onset of soul consciousness corresponds to Maslow's need to know and understand, and Carl Jung's concept of individuation. I call this level Transformation. It is the first level of self-actualisation, and could perhaps be more accurately described as the level of self-activation or individuation. It is the level at which we begin to inquire into the true nature of who we are, and the meaning we attach to our lives. At this level we are able to step back far enough from the social environment that has conditioned our beliefs and values, to make our own choices, so we can become the author of our own lives, and develop our own voice.

**The second level of self-actualisation:** Cosmic consciousness corresponds to the second level of self-actualisation. I refer to this level of consciousness as *Internal Cohesion*—the fifth of the Seven Levels of Consciousness. At this level of consciousness your ego and your soul blend together—this is the meaning of internal cohesion. You find your personal sense of transcendent purpose (soul's purpose), and you bring the beliefs of your ego into alignment with the values of your soul. Your ego and soul become fully integrated. You become a soul-infused personality.

**The third level of self-actualization:** God consciousness corresponds to the third level of self-actualisation. I refer to this level of consciousness as *Making a Difference*— the sixth level of consciousness. This is the level where you begin to uncover and develop the deeper attributes of your soul. You develop a sense of knowing that goes beyond reasoning, and your intuition begins to direct your decision-making. At this level of consciousness, you fully activate your soul’s purpose by making a difference in the world. You quickly learn that the degree of difference you can make is significantly leveraged by your ability to collaborate with others that share a similar purpose.

**Fourth level of self-actualisation:** Unity consciousness corresponds to the fourth level of self-actualisation. I refer to this level of consciousness as *Service*—the seventh level of consciousness. We arrive at this level of consciousness when the pursuit of making a difference becomes a way of life. At this level of consciousness we embark on a life of self-less service. We are fully at ease with uncertainty and can tap into the deepest sources of wisdom. We learn to operate with humility and compassion.

Whilst the correlations I have made with Vedic Science are not exact, they are sufficiently close to warrant attention, and provide insights into the underlying spiritual significance of the process of self-actualisation.

As we progress through each of the higher levels of consciousness, we feel an increasing sense of connectedness to the world that shows up as an expanded sense of identity. We feel a sense of oneness with ourselves, with our family, with our community, with the organisation we work for, with our nation, with humanity and the planet, and eventually with the whole of creation. I have described these different levels expansive inclusion in a paper entitled.

#### **Re-labelling the lower levels of consciousness**

The next change I made to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs was to combine the physiological survival level with the safety level into a single category. I felt justified in doing this since the physiological needs of the body are essentially taken care of by our cellular consciousness—not by our personal consciousness. It is only in times of distress or dysfunction that our personal consciousness intervenes in the functioning of the body. For example, our body sends signals to our personal consciousness when it needs food and water or needs to eliminate waste. Our personal consciousness is not in control of these processes. I named this combined level *Survival Consciousness* because it focuses on issues of physical survival, physical safety and physical health.

I also renamed the level of love/belonging, *Relationship Consciousness*. I felt justified in doing this because the quality of love we experience in life is directly affected by our ability to build meaningful relationships and experience a sense of belonging. I did not rename the self-esteem level. This level, together with the relationship level, represents our emotional needs.

Thus, I created three levels of human consciousness from Maslow's Hierarchy of basic needs:

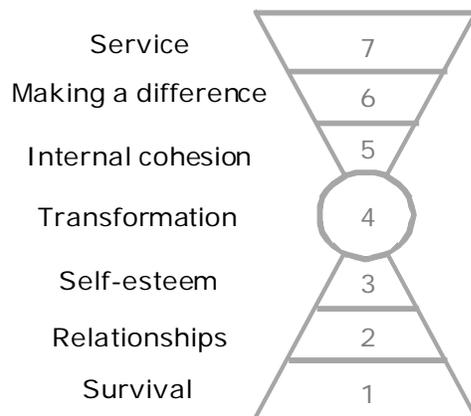
- Survival Consciousness (survival and safety combined)
- Relationship Consciousness (replacing love/belonging)
- Self-esteem Consciousness.

Together these needs represent the main stages of the emergence and development of the ego. With these three changes to Abraham Maslow's model:

- Changing from a focus on needs to consciousness
- Re-structuring and re-labelling of the levels of consciousness
- Expanding the concept of self-actualisation.

I was able to construct a model of consciousness that corresponds to the seven life themes that are intrinsic to the evolution of human consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

A diagram of the model and a description of the Seven Levels of Personal Consciousness are presented below.



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<sup>1</sup> I wrote about the higher levels of human consciousness in my first book – *A Guide to Liberating Your Soul*, and I integrated them into Maslow's hierarchy of needs and developed the Seven Levels of Consciousness Model in my second book – *Liberating the Corporate Soul: Building a visionary organization*.

Levels of Consciousness		Motivation/Needs		Needs
7	Service	Leading a life of self-less service for the good of humanity and the planet.		Spiritual
6	Making a Difference	Making a positive difference in the world by collaborating with others.		
5	Internal cohesion	Finding a sense of purpose and personal meaning in your existence.		
4	Transformation	Managing, mastering or releasing the subconscious, fear-based beliefs that cause you to feel anxious about not being able to satisfy your deficiency needs.		Mental
3	Self-esteem	Feeling a sense of personal self-worth.	Underlying anxieties about not being respected and not being enough.	Emotional
2	Relationship	Feeling a sense of love and belonging.	Underlying anxieties about not being accepted and not being loved.	
1	Survival	Feeling secure and safe in the world.	Underlying anxieties about not being safe or secure and not having enough.	Physical
		<b>HEALTHY MOTIVATIONS</b>	<b>UNHEALTHY MOTIVATIONS</b>	