

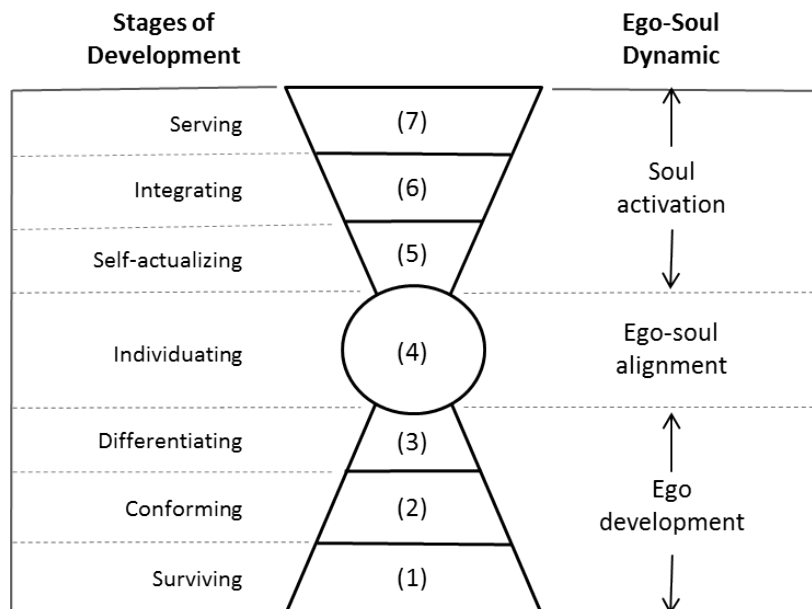
What is Well-being?

By Richard Barrett, Chairman and Founder of Barrett Values Centre

Well-being is the ability to satisfy the needs of the stage of psychological development you are at.ⁱ

There are seven stages of psychological development. The first three stages of development involve establishing the ego as a viable, independent entity in its physical, social and cultural framework of existence. The fourth stage of development involves aligning the motivations of your ego with the motivations of your soul. The last three stages of development involve activating your soul's consciousness. The Seven Stages of Psychological Development and the three evolutionary stages of the ego-soul dynamic are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The seven stages of psychological development





Ego development

Between the moment we are born and the time we reach physical and mental maturity, around 20–25 years old, we pass through three stages of psychological development: surviving, conforming and differentiating. What we are learning during these stages of psychological development is how to satisfy our deficiency needs—our survival, safety and security needs—in the physical, social and cultural framework of our existence. If for any reason, you are unable to satisfy your deficiency needs you will feel anxious and fearful.

How well you were able to master your deficiency needs will, to a large extent, depend on the parental programming and cultural conditioning you experienced during your infant, childhood and teenage years. If you grew up in a safe physical environment and a loving and respectful social and cultural environment, without experiencing any traumatic experiences, you will find it relatively easy to master your deficiency needs. If, you grew up in a challenging physical, social and cultural environment where you had to struggle, and often failed, to get your deficiency needs met, you will find it difficult to master your deficiency needs.

Ego-soul alignment

The process of ego-soul alignment begins at the individuating stage of psychological development. What you are attempting to do at this stage of development is to let go of the fears of your ego that keep you dependent on your social and cultural frameworks of existence to satisfy your deficiency needs. The goal at this stage of development is to become a viable independent human being—to find freedom and autonomy in your life by dis-embedding yourself from your tribe—from the social and cultural context of your dependency. You do this by letting go of the fears you learned during the first three stages of development about satisfying your deficiency needs and by becoming responsible and accountable for every aspect of your life.

Unlike the ego stages of psychological development, the individuating stage of development is not thrust upon you by the biological and societal exigencies of growing up: it is driven by the evolutionary impulse of your soul willing itself to become fully present in 3-D material awareness.

The individuating stage can be quite challenging for a number of reasons. First, it involves facing and overcoming your fears. Second, it involves becoming responsible and accountable for every aspect of your life. Third, it involves embracing your soul nature, the values that support soul consciousness. This may mean distancing yourself from your family of origin, your cultural heritage and your religious affiliation.



Soul activation

The last three stages of psychological development represent various stages of soul activation. If you have been relatively successful in mastering the individuating stage of development, you will begin to feel the pull of the self-actualizing stage of development in your early 40's. This is the stage of development where you begin to embrace your true nature and your inborn, soul-given gifts and talents. This is also normally the stage where you begin to uncover your soul's purpose, the activities that give your life meaning.

Uncovering your soul's purpose can be challenging especially if the career you have chosen does not align with your inborn gifts and talents. I know first-hand what it means to give up a successful career to follow your soul purpose. It was scary but it also felt unavoidable: it was something I had to do. Now, some twenty-five years later, I am in awe of the benefits and the joy that choosing to follow my soul's purpose has brought to my life.

The next stage of soul activation—the integrating stage of development, which usually occurs in your 50's—involves connecting with others in unconditional loving relationships so you can use your gifts and talents to make a difference in the world. The hard work of understanding who you are, and embracing your soul purpose is past. Your challenge now is to develop your empathy skills so you can connect and collaborate with others and thereby use your collective gifts and talents to make a difference in people's lives. If you cannot reach out and connect with others, you will be unable to fulfil your purpose.

The last stage of soul activation—the serving stage of development, which usually occurs in your 60's—involves living a life of self-less service focused on future generations and the good of humanity. Having learned how to connect, what you are now tasked with doing is making a contribution to the common good. To fulfil this requirement, you will need to develop your compassion, to embrace the deepest aspects of your soul's intelligence and wisdom to help those who are suffering, disadvantaged or are less well off than yourself. At the integrating stage you make use of your empathy skills to connect; at the serving stage, you use your compassion skills to contribute.

Table 1 summarises what is required to achieve a sense of well-being at each stage of psychological development.

Table 1: What well-being means at each stage of psychological development

Stages of psychological development	Age range	Developmental task	You achieve well-being when you can ...
Serving	60+ years	Alleviating suffering and caring for the well-being of your family, community and future generations.	Satisfy your need for self-less service.
Integrating	50–59 years	Connecting with other in unconditional loving relationships.	Satisfy your need to make a difference.
Self-actualizing	40–49 years	Expressing your true nature by embracing your soul’s values and purpose.	Satisfy your need to find meaning and purpose.
Individuating	25–39 years	Discovering your true identity—letting go of your dependence on the approval of others.	Satisfy your need for freedom and autonomy.
Differentiating	8–24 years	Establishing yourself in a peer community by being admired for your skills and talents.	Satisfy your need for respect and recognition.
Conforming	2–7 years	Feeling safe and protected by being close to your kin and your family.	Satisfy your need for love, and belonging.
Surviving	Birth to 2 years	Staying alive and physically healthy by getting your survival needs met.	Satisfy your need for physiological survival.

For more information, go to www.richardbarrett.net

ⁱ This article is an extract from [A New Psychology of Human Well-Being: An Exploration of the Influence of Ego-Soul Dynamics on Mental and Physical Health](#) by Richard Barrett.