

How to Use Spiral Dynamics for Well-Being

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The theory of Spiral Dynamics by Clare W. Graves offers a fascinating model to illustrate human evolution and development. Not only that, it exemplifies the social evolution of our race.

Graves summed up his theory by explaining, "Briefly, what I am proposing is that the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding, emergent, oscillating spiraling process marked by progressive subordination of older, lower-order behavior systems to newer, higher-order systems as man's existential problems change."

Graves developed a taxonomy consisting of eight levels of subsistence values, common to all people. These included the a) Automatic b) Tribal c) Egocentric d) Sacrificial e) Materialistic f) Sociocentric g) Cognitive and h) Experiential Levels of Being.

The **Automatic level** is a basic one, where we value our physical survival. According to human history, this level describes our early development where people gathered in bands for the purpose of meeting their physical needs.

The **Tribal level** is a step up, where tradition is valued as a means of ensuring safety for the clan. The tribal age began 50,000 years ago, and continues to this day in some cultures.

The **Egocentric level** is a higher level, where the strong and heroic are valued. This level operated at the beginning of recorded history.

The **Sacrificial level** perpetuated the founding of the world's great religions. It also spurred the notion of sacrifice in the present for a greater reward in the hereafter. It led to the valuing of absolute and deep truth.

The **Materialistic level** was evident during the Renaissance and the early Industrial Revolution. This level shows a concern for personal independence, the development of science and the so-called conquest of the physical world.

The **Sociocentric level** is a recent one. It is evident in the Humanist method common in the 20th century. People, community, and friendship are valued.

The **Cognitive level** led to personal independence and functioning within a dynamic supportive system.

The **Experiential level** is evident today in the New Millennium. This is a holistic level, where people are interested in systems theory and global consciousness. We begin to recognize that we are part of a whole, all are connected.

The first six levels are "subsistence levels" marked by "first-tier thinking." Then there occurs a revolutionary shift in consciousness the emergence of "being levels" and "second-tier thinking," of which there are two major waves.

Within these eight levels, Graves differentiated two paradigms at work. The odd-numbered levels involved the individual and group self asserting power over its environment. The even-numbered levels involved the self adapting to its environment.

The eighth level, the Experiential represents the exciting movement that is so apparent now, in the present. It represents the best we can be. Where we show a genuine empathy and caring for all others, as well as ourselves. Where inner development is just as important as external success.

We recognize that we are not separate individuals, but part of one another. All is connected.

This higher level represents a high level of wellness where we can experience life from a humble yet exalted perspective. When love and goodwill predominate our thinking and way of being, miracles happen. Our health improves. Our relationships flourish. Our careers skyrocket. Our sense of purpose and fulfillment are at their highest. Everything flows. Everything connects. Everything has meaning. Isn't it time to allow yourself the luxury of basking in the comfort and security of the eighth level? It's a space and perspective whose time has definitely come!