



# The Dynamic Nature of the Self: Exploring the Similarities between Philosophical and Psychological Interpretations

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the similarities and intersections between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the concept of the five koshas in Indian philosophy. The hierarchy of needs, proposed by psychologist Abraham Maslow, outlines a framework of human motivations, ranging from basic physiological needs to the pursuit of self-actualization. The five koshas, a central tenet of Vedantic philosophy, describe the layers of human existence, from the physical body to the innermost spiritual essence. By examining the parallels between these two influential paradigms, this paper aims to elucidate the complementary nature of psychological and philosophical approaches to understanding the human experience.

**Keywords;** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Five Koshas, Five Sheaths Around Soul, Indian Philosophy, Self-Actualization, Transcendence

## 1. Introduction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the concept of the five koshas in Indian philosophy present intriguing parallels in their exploration of the human experience. Maslow's theory, developed in the 1940s, outlines a five-tier hierarchy of needs that drive human motivation and behavior, ranging from physiological to self-actualization (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Similarly, the five koshas, a foundational concept in Vedantic philosophy, delineate five layers of human existence, from the physical to the subtle and transcendent (Ayandele & Etim, 2020). The physiological needs at the base of Maslow's hierarchy align with the annamaya kosha, the physical body and its material requirements. The need for safety and security corresponds to the pranamaya kosha, the vital life force and energetic sheath (Kodali, 2018). The belongingness and love needs resonate with the manomaya kosha, the mental and emotional realm. The esteem needs find parallels in the vijnanamaya kosha, the realm of intellect and discernment (Groves et al., 1975). And the pinnacle of self-actualization in Maslow's theory correlates with the anandamaya kosha, the blissful, spiritual essence of the self. These convergences suggest that the human experience, when viewed through the lenses of both Western psychology and Eastern philosophy, shares a common foundation of interconnected needs and layers of being. By acknowledging and addressing these multifaceted aspects of the human condition, we can foster a more holistic understanding of the individual and their journey towards fulfillment and self-realization.

### 1.1 Background

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a widely recognized psychological theory that has influenced various disciplines (Ayandele & Etim, 2020). The theory outlines a five-tier hierarchy of human needs, ranging from basic physiological requirements to the pursuit of self-actualization (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). The concept of the five koshas, a central tenet of Vedantic philosophy, describes the multi-layered nature of the human experience, encompassing the physical, energetic, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Despite the differing origins and cultural contexts of these frameworks, their underlying principles and insights into the human condition suggest a remarkable convergence of philosophical and psychological perspectives.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Maslow's theory, human beings are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, with the most basic, physiological needs at the bottom, and the need for self-actualization at the top (Georgeta, 2016). The hierarchy is organized as follows:

- Physiological needs:** These are the most fundamental needs for survival, such as food, water, sleep, and shelter. They are the base of the hierarchy and must be met before higher-level needs can be addressed.
- Safety needs:** These include the need for security, stability, and protection from physical and emotional harm. They provide a sense of safety and stability in one's environment.
- Belonging and love needs:** These are the needs for social connection, acceptance, and affiliation with others. They involve the desire to be part of a community and to give and receive love.

4. **Esteem needs:** These include the need for self-respect, recognition, and appreciation from others. They also involve the desire for personal accomplishment and the feeling of being valued.
5. **Self-actualization:** This is the highest level of the hierarchy, where individuals strive to reach their full potential and achieve personal growth, creativity, and fulfillment. It involves the desire for self-realization, the development of one's capabilities, and the pursuit of meaningful experiences that transcend the self.

### The Five Koshas in Indian Philosophy

The concept of the five koshas in Vedantic philosophy provides a comprehensive view of the human being, encompassing both the physical and the spiritual aspects. The five koshas are:

1. **Annamaya Kosha:** The physical body, made up of the elements of the material world.
2. **Pranamaya Kosha:** The vital energy or life force that animates the physical body.
3. **Manomaya Kosha:** The mental and emotional sheath, encompassing thoughts, feelings, and psychological processes.
4. **Vijnanamaya Kosha:** The intellectual and discernment sheath, responsible for reasoning, understanding, and decision-making.
5. **Anandamaya Kosha:** The innermost, blissful, and spiritual essence of the self, the source of true joy and inner peace.

The five koshas are often depicted as a series of concentric circles, with the physical body at the outermost layer and the spiritual essence at the core. The interconnectedness of these layers is a fundamental aspect of Vedantic philosophy, which emphasizes the unity of the individual with the cosmic ([Inbadas, 2017](#))

### 1.2 Objectives

This paper examines the similarities and connections between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the concept of the five koshas in Indian philosophy. By analyzing the parallels between these two frameworks, the study aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of human needs, motivations, and the path to self-realization and well-being (Ayandele & Etim, 2020). The primary objectives of this research paper are:

1. To identify the key similarities and convergences between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the concept of the five koshas in Indian philosophy.
2. To analyze how the intersection of these two frameworks can provide a more comprehensive and integrated perspective on the human condition, including the various levels of needs, motivations, and the path to self-actualization.
3. To explore the potential implications of this comparative analysis for fields such as psychology, philosophy, personal development.
4. To suggest ways in which the integration of these perspectives can contribute to a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing human needs and the pursuit of fulfillment.

### 1.3 Methodology

This paper will use a comparative, qualitative approach, drawing on scholarly sources on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas in Indian philosophy ([Gherman, 2012](#)).

The study will involve:

1. Comprehensive review of the literature on Maslow's and the five koshas' theoretical foundations, key concepts, and empirical research.
2. Identifying key similarities, parallels, and convergences between the two frameworks, focusing on their underlying principles, levels of human needs, and approaches to self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment.
3. Analyzing the potential synergies and complementarities between Western psychological and Eastern philosophical perspectives, to develop a more integrative and holistic understanding of the human experience.
4. Exploring the practical implications and applications of this comparative analysis, particularly for personal development, organizational management, and human well-being.
5. Synthesizing the findings and formulating a conceptual framework capturing the key insights and contributions.

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## 2. Literature Review

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a well-known theory in Western psychology that outlines different levels of human needs, from basic physiological requirements to the highest level of self-actualization ([Clark, 1960](#)). This framework is often depicted as a pyramid, with the most fundamental needs at the base and the more complex, self-fulfilling needs at the top.

According to Maslow, individuals are motivated by five core needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The lower-level needs, such as physiological and safety, must be satisfied before the higher-level needs, such as love/belonging and esteem, can become driving factors. The concept of the five koshas, on the other hand, is a central idea in Vedantic philosophy in India. The five koshas, or "sheaths," represent the different layers of the human being, ranging from the physical body to the innermost spiritual essence.

### 2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, developed in the 1940s, is a well-known theory in Western psychology that outlines different levels of human needs, from basic physiological requirements to the highest level of self-actualization. This framework is often depicted as a pyramid, with the most fundamental needs at the base and the more complex, self-fulfilling needs at the top.

1. **Physiological needs:** The most basic requirements for human survival, such as food, water, sleep, and oxygen.
2. **Safety needs:** The desire for security, stability, and protection from physical and psychological harm. These include the need for a safe and predictable environment, as well as financial, social, and emotional stability.
3. **Love/belonging needs:** The desire for interpersonal connections, such as the need for friendship, intimacy, and a sense of belonging to a group or community.
4. **Esteem needs:** The desire for respect, recognition, and a sense of personal worth and achievement. These include both the need for self-esteem and the need for the approval and respect of others.
5. **Self-actualization needs:** The highest level of the hierarchy, characterized by the desire to fulfill one's full potential, engage in meaningful work, and contribute to the greater good. This level is often associated with the pursuit of personal growth, creativity, and the realization of one's unique talents and abilities.

#### Empirical research and critiques:

Maslow's hierarchy of needs has become a widely recognized and influential theory in the field of psychology, with numerous empirical studies supporting the general validity of the framework. However, the theory has also faced significant criticism and challenges ([Wahba & Bridwell, 1976](#)).

One common critique is that the hierarchy is overly rigid and fails to account for individual differences and contextual factors that may influence the prioritization and satisfaction of needs. Some researchers have proposed modifications or alternative models that better capture the dynamic and nuanced nature of human motivation ([Groves et al., 1975](#)).

The authors focus on evaluating the empirical research associated with Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory in an effort to review the validity of the theory itself. The theory focuses on determining the motivation and behaviour of employees by deciphering the basic needs of human beings who are part of a hierarchy. The authors debate whether or not self-actualization can be classified as a basic human need ([Wahba & Bridwell, 1976](#)).

### 2.2 The Five Koshas in Indian Philosophy

#### Historical background and development

The concept of the five koshas is a central tenet of Vedantic philosophy, which has its roots in ancient Indian spiritual traditions. According to this framework, the human being is composed of five distinct layers or "sheaths" (koshas) that collectively make up the totality of the individual ([Wahba & Bridwell, 1976](#)).

1. **The Annamaya Kosha**, or the physical body, is the outermost sheath that represents the material, tangible aspect of the human being.
2. **The Pranamaya Kosha** is the subtle energy body, encompassing the breath, life force, and vital functions.
3. **The Manomaya Kosha** is the mental/emotional sheath, which includes the mind, intellect, and the realm of thoughts, feelings, and desires.
4. **The Vijñānamaya Kosha** is the intuitive or wisdom body, representing the higher faculties of understanding, discrimination, and insight.
5. **The Anandamaya Kosha** is the innermost sheath, the bliss body or the spiritual essence of the individual, the source of pure joy and fulfillment.

The five koshas are seen as interconnected and interdependent, with the higher koshas encompassing and transcending the lower ones.

#### Philosophical and spiritual significance:

The five koshas framework in Indian philosophy offers a holistic and integrated understanding of the human being, recognizing the physical, energetic, mental, intuitive, and spiritual dimensions as essential and interrelated aspects of the self ([Cornwell & Higgins, 2017](#)).

This perspective stands in contrast to the more reductionist and compartmentalized views of the human person that have dominated much of Western thought. The Koshas model emphasizes the importance of cultivating harmony and balance across the different layers of the self, as a path towards greater self-knowledge, spiritual growth, and fulfillment ([Wahba & Bridwell, 1976](#)).

#### **Empirical research and critiques:**

While the concept of the five koshas has deep roots in Indian spiritual traditions, empirical research directly examining this framework is limited. Some scholars have drawn parallels between the koshas and insights from Western psychology, such as the relationship between the mental/emotional kosha and Maslow's hierarchy of needs ([Paranjpe, 1996](#)). However, the philosophical and spiritual nature of the koshas model presents challenges in terms of empirical validation and measurement.

#### **2.3 Parallels and intersections with Maslow's hierarchy:**

While Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas framework emerged from quite different cultural and intellectual contexts, there are some intriguing parallels and areas of intersection between the two ([Cornwell & Higgins, 2017](#)).

Both models recognize a hierarchy or progression of human needs and capacities, ranging from the most basic physiological requirements to the highest levels of self-actualization or spiritual realization ([Gherman, 2012](#)). Additionally, the different levels or layers described in each framework can be seen as broadly corresponding to one another.

For example, the physiological and safety needs in Maslow's model could be seen as analogous to the Annamaya and Pranamaya koshas, while the love/belonging and esteem needs parallel the Manomaya and Vijñānamaya koshas. Finally, the notion of self-actualization in Maslow's theory resonates with the Anandamaya kosha, the spiritual essence or bliss body, as the pinnacle of human potential and fulfillment.

#### **2.4 Previous Comparative Studies**

Scholars have examined the connections between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas framework from Indian philosophy. One study proposes that the koshas can be seen as an "alternative adaptive system" that provides a better understanding of the spiritual and relational aspects of human motivation, which may not be fully captured by Maslow's hierarchy alone ([Koltko-Rivera, 2006](#)). Another analysis highlights how the koshas framework offers a more holistic and integrated perspective on human development, encompassing the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions, compared to Maslow's more compartmentalized approach ([Tattvabodha and the hierarchical necessity of Abraham Maslow, 2016](#)). Further analyses have drawn parallels between the physiological and safety needs in Maslow's model and the Annamaya and Pranamaya koshas, as well as the similarities between self-actualization and the Anandamaya kosha ([Stoler, 2021](#)). However, these comparative studies also acknowledge the challenges and limitations in directly equating or mapping the two frameworks, given their distinct philosophical and cultural origins. Overall, the intersections and divergences between Maslow's hierarchy and the five koshas present a rich area for further exploration, with the potential to yield a more holistic and cross-cultural understanding of human development and fulfillment.

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### **3. Conceptual Frameworks**

The research paper on the similarities between philosophical and psychological perspectives, specifically exploring the intersection of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Five Koshas in Indian Philosophy, will be structured around three key conceptual frameworks.

#### **3.1 Philosophical Foundations**

1. **Philosophical underpinnings of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:** Maslow's work was influenced by various philosophical traditions, including humanistic and existentialist perspectives. He was particularly interested in the idea of self-actualization and the inherent drive towards growth and fulfillment in human beings.
2. **Philosophical underpinnings of the five koshas:** The five koshas framework is rooted in the Vedantic tradition of Indian philosophy, which emphasizes the interconnected and multidimensional nature of the self. The koshas model reflects the philosophical view of the human being as a spiritual entity encompassing physical, energetic, mental, intuitive, and blissful dimensions.

#### **3.2 Psychological Foundations**

##### **Psychological theories supporting Maslow's model:**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was significantly influenced by the foundational psychological theories of Freud, Jung, and Adler. Freud's insights into the unconscious and human drives, Jung's emphasis on the holistic psyche, and Adler's focus on social belonging and self-improvement, all contributed to Maslow's conceptualization of human motivation and self-actualization. By synthesizing these psychological perspectives, Maslow developed his influential hierarchy of needs, which provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of human development and fulfillment ([Koltko-Rivera, 2006](#)).

##### **Psychological insights from the five Koshas framework:**

The five koshas framework offers a holistic and multidimensional perspective on the human experience by recognizing the interconnections between the physical, emotional, mental, intuitive, and spiritual aspects of the self. This framework can be viewed through a psychological lens, providing valuable insights that complement Western psychological theories. Psychologists have explored the parallels between the five koshas and various psychological constructs, suggesting that the koshas correspond to distinct yet interrelated dimensions of the human psyche, such as the physiological, emotional, cognitive, and transpersonal realms. This cross-pollination of ideas has the potential to yield a more integrative and spiritually-informed understanding of psychological processes and human development ([Ashok & Thimmappa, 2006](#)).

#### 4. Comparative Analysis

Both Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas framework present a hierarchical or progressive model of human development and fulfilment, with lower-level needs or aspects of the self-serving as the foundation for the higher levels.

##### 4.1 Physiological Needs and Annamaya Kosha

Maslow's physiological needs, such as food, water, and sleep, can be seen as analogous to the Annamaya kosha, which is the physical or food sheath. Both frameworks recognize the foundational importance of attending to the basic biological and physical needs for sustenance and survival.

The koshas framework, with the Annamaya kosha as the foundation, provides a more holistic and integrated perspective on the physical dimension of human existence, accounting for not only the material aspects but also the energetic and subtle elements that constitute the physical body and its functioning ([Ashok & Thimmappa, 2006](#)).

##### 4.2 Safety Needs and Pranamaya Kosha

Maslow's safety needs, encompassing security, stability, and protection, can be compared to the Pranamaya kosha, the energy sheath in the Indian philosophical framework. This kosha represents the vital life force, the energetic and physiological processes that sustain the physical body and provide a sense of well-being and security ([Sannito, 2022](#)). Additionally, the Pranamaya Kosha includes the emotional and psychological dimensions of safety, such as the need for emotional stability, belonging, and acceptance, which correspond to Maslow's higher-level needs of love and esteem ([Panchakosha, 2023](#)). Just as Maslow emphasizes the need for safety and stability as a prerequisite for higher-level needs, the Pranamaya kosha in the koshas framework serves as a foundation for the subsequent mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the self.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies safety and security as a fundamental requirement, encompassing physical safety, job security, financial stability, and a sense of protection from harm. This aligns with the Pranamaya kosha in the Indian philosophical framework, which represents the energetic and vital life force that sustains the physical body and provides a feeling of well-being and stability ([Zheng et al., 2016](#)). The intersection of these two concepts highlights the importance of addressing both physical and energetic needs for overall human flourishing. By ensuring a foundation of safety, security, and vitality, individuals can then cultivate higher-level psychological and spiritual needs, leading to greater well-being, self-actualization, and fulfillment.

##### 4.3 Love/Belonging and Manomaya Kosha

Maslow's hierarchy of needs identifies the social needs of love, belonging, and affiliation as crucial for human development and well-being. These higher-level needs build upon the foundational physiological and safety needs, reflecting the inherent human drive for connection, acceptance, and interpersonal relationships ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#)).

The Manomaya Kosha, one of the five koshas in the Indian philosophical framework, corresponds to the mental and emotional aspects of the self. This kosha encompasses our thoughts, feelings, and the entire psychological realm, including our cognitive processes, emotional intelligence, and subjective experiences. It represents the interplay between the mind and the heart, the rational and the intuitive dimensions of our being ([Yoga and the 5 Koshas: An Inward Journey of Awareness, 2022](#)). The resonance between Maslow's love/belonging needs and the Manomaya Kosha highlights the importance of cultivating a healthy and harmonious relationship between the mind and emotions for optimal human development.

The interrelation between the social needs in Maslow's model and the Manomaya Kosha is evident. Our need for love, belonging, and esteem is deeply rooted in our mental and emotional makeup. The ability to form meaningful relationships, engage in social interactions, and feel a sense of emotional connection and acceptance is vital for our overall well-being and self-actualization ([Sheldon & Gunz, 2009](#)). The Manomaya Kosha, with its emphasis on the holistic integration of the mind and emotions, provides a nuanced understanding of how our social needs are intricately linked to our inner psychological landscape.

##### 4.4 Esteem Needs and Vijnanamaya Kosha

Esteem and recognition in Maslow's model: Closely related to the need for belonging and love, Maslow's hierarchy identifies the need for esteem as a critical stage in human development. This encompasses both self-esteem (a sense of personal competence, mastery, and self-respect) and the desire for esteem from others (status, recognition, and appreciation) ([Rajasakran et al., 2014](#)). Wisdom and intellect in the Vijnanamaya Kosha: This kosha

represents the intellect, discernment, and higher cognitive functions. In this layer, the individual develops a deeper understanding of themselves, their place in the world, and their relationship with the divine or spiritual realm (Sannito, 2022).

**Resonance between esteem needs and Vijnanamaya Kosha:** The need for self-esteem, recognition, and respect from others in Maslow's theory aligns with the Vijnanamaya Kosha's focus on the development of intellectual, intuitive, and spiritual faculties. Just as Maslow emphasizes the importance of esteem for self-actualization, the Vijnanamaya Kosha represents the individual's ability to cultivate a nuanced understanding of their own identity, talents, and purpose, leading to a heightened sense of self-worth and fulfillment (Dutta, 2014). The intersection of these two concepts highlights the importance of not only meeting our social needs for belonging and love but also nourishing our intellectual and spiritual capacities.

#### ***4.5 Self-Actualization and Anandamaya Kosha***

##### **Self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchy:**

Maslow's concept of self-actualization represents the pinnacle of human fulfillment and growth. It is the drive to become the best version of oneself, to fully realize one's unique potential, and to live a life of meaning, purpose, and authenticity. Self-actualized individuals are characterized by qualities such as self-acceptance, spontaneity, problem-centered focus, and a deep appreciation for life. This highest level of Maslow's hierarchy reflects the human aspiration to transcend the constraints of the ego and to achieve a state of self-realization and wholeness.

##### **Bliss and transcendence in the Anandamaya Kosha:**

The Anandamaya Kosha represents the dimension of bliss, ecstasy, and transcendence within the Indian philosophical framework. This innermost layer of the self is associated with the experience of pure joy, ecstatic union, and a sense of oneness with the divine or the universal consciousness. It reflects the highest human aspiration to achieve a state of profound fulfillment, inner peace, and spiritual enlightenment, which parallels Maslow's concept of self-actualization as the pinnacle of human growth and development.

##### **Parallels between self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment:**

The parallels between Maslow's concept of self-actualization and the notion of spiritual fulfillment in the Anandamaya Kosha are profound. Both represent the pinnacle of human growth and development, where the individual transcends the limitations of the ego and attains a state of profound inner peace, joy, and oneness with something greater than themselves. Self-actualization, as described by Maslow, encompasses the realization of one's unique potential, a deep sense of authenticity, and a focus on self-transcendence. Similarly, the Anandamaya Kosha reflects the aspiration to achieve a state of bliss, ecstatic union, and a direct experience of the divine or universal consciousness. This resonance between the psychological and philosophical perspectives highlights the human drive to not only actualize our potentials but also to uncover the deeper spiritual dimensions of our existence, leading to a profound sense of wholeness and fulfillment.

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## **5. Discussion**

The exploration of the parallels and intersections between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas in Indian philosophy provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the human experience (Stoler, 2021). By examining the resonances between these two frameworks, we can gain a more holistic perspective on the multidimensional nature of human development, motivation, and self-realization.

### ***5.1 Integrative Insights***

The comparative analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas in Indian philosophy has yielded a rich synthesis of integrative insights. This integrated perspective provides a holistic understanding of human development, motivation, and self-realization, encompassing the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of our being. The intersection of these models offers a unique lens to better comprehend the complex interplay between our cognitive processes, emotional intelligence, and subjective experiences, as well as the relationship between mind, body, and spirit. These integrative insights hold the potential to inform and enrich our understanding of human psychology, philosophy, and the pursuit of holistic well-being.

### ***5.2 Implications for Psychology and Philosophy***

The exploration of the parallels between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas in Indian philosophy can have significant practical applications in therapy, education, and personal development. By integrating these two frameworks, mental health professionals can develop more holistic and tailored approaches to supporting clients in their journey of self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment. In the educational realm, this integrated perspective can inform curriculum design and pedagogical methods, empowering students to cultivate a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of human growth and well-being. Furthermore, this integrative approach holds great potential for interdisciplinary collaborations, fostering cross-pollination of ideas between psychology, philosophy, and other related fields, and leading to innovative approaches to personal development and the pursuit of holistic well-being.

### 5.3 Practical Applications

The exploration of Maslow's hierarchy and the five koshas has practical applications in therapy, education, and personal development. By integrating these frameworks, professionals can develop holistic approaches to support clients' self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment. This integrated perspective can inform educational curricula and empower students to understand the multidimensional nature of human growth. Furthermore, this integrative approach holds potential for interdisciplinary collaborations, fostering cross-pollination of ideas and leading to innovative approaches to personal development and holistic well-being.

## 6. Conclusion

The exploration of the similarities and intersections between Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the five koshas in Indian philosophy has revealed a rich tapestry of insights that can enhance our understanding of the human experience. By examining the parallels between these two influential frameworks, we can gain a more holistic perspective on the multidimensional nature of human development, motivation, and self-realization. The resonances between the models highlight the importance of nourishing the various layers of the self, from the basic physiological and safety needs to the highest realms of self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment.

This integrated approach holds the potential to inform and enrich psychological theories, philosophical discourse, and practical applications in therapy, education, and personal development. By embracing the complementary insights of these frameworks, we can cultivate a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between our cognitive processes, emotional intelligence, and subjective experiences, as well as the intricate relationship between the mind, body, and soul.

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