

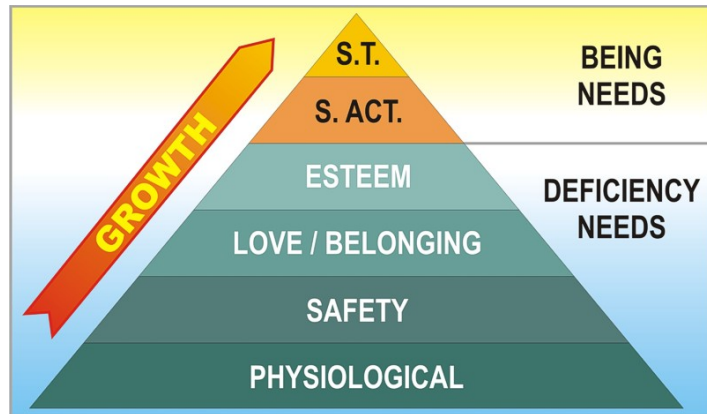
THE PROPER KEEPING OF TIGERS AND MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

by

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Introduction:

In his 1943 paper, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, American psychologist Abraham Maslow classified the range of human needs into a hierarchy of priorities. In this system, human needs are addressed in an inherent optimal order impelling us to first survive, then thrive, and finally reach our potential (self actualize). When we satisfy each level of related needs, we naturally shift our attention to the needs of the next higher level of the hierarchy until we reach our optimal state.



Although designed to explain and predict human behavior, Maslow's ideas are clearly relevant to animal husbandry, especially within the growing consensus that higher animals experience consciousness and emotions. The author fully shares in that consensus.

The Structure of the Hierarchy:

The Maslovian *hierarchy of needs* is represented by a pyramid with six levels, the lower four levels of which are the *deficiency needs* associated with physiological states, while the top two levels are *being needs*, associated with psychological states. According to this hierarchy, higher groups of needs only get attention once all the needs beneath it are at least mainly satisfied.

Deficiency needs:

Physiological needs: These are needs having an immediate effect on physical wellbeing, a state Maslow calls *homeostasis*. This state is achieved when food, drink and air are provided. Other lesser intensity needs falling in this category are basic sexual release, bodily comfort and basic exercise. The feeling of unwellness caused by unfulfilled physiological needs tends to preoccupy the individual.

It requires very little effort to identify these needs directly in tigers. These animals have an uncertain food supply and may go for long periods of time without eating. Lack of food due to famine, illness, age or injury can drive a tiger to overcome strong fears and

aversions in search of available prey. The amount of time spent hunting and the fierceness with which prey is defended from competitors is directly proportional to the degree of hunger experienced. When grossly unfulfilled, physiological needs are felt as pain.

Safety needs: When physiological needs are met, the need for safety becomes the next priority. Safety and security are so important that at times even physiological needs are set aside.

Tigers address their safety needs in a number of ways including finding adequate cover, carefully delineating a territory with scent marks and vocalizations, and as far as possible substitution of choreographed posturing and displays for physical confrontation. This is especially important among carnivores since their opponents carry deadly armaments and a severe injury could impair or prevent successful hunting. When grossly unfulfilled, safety needs are felt as fear.

Love/Belonging needs: After safety needs are fulfilled, social needs come to the fore. This involves all relationships based upon emotional ties, such as friendship, sexual relationship, or having a family. Humans want to be accepted, and to be affiliated with groups. They need to feel loved by others, and to be accepted by them. In the absence of these elements, people become increasingly susceptible to loneliness, social anxiety and depression.

Tigers are often referred to as solitary animals who come together only for mating and raising offspring. However "solitary" has long been used as a synonym for "isolation". In fact, solitude among tigers is much like solitude among humans, the desire for personal space. The *proxemics* (personal space dynamics) of tigers are different than those of humans or group-living lions. Humans experience a different emotional reaction to solitude (as in the privacy of one's bedroom) than they do with isolation (as in being left home alone). This difference in *social opportunity*, a reaction to the availability of potential social contact, is important for both humans and tigers. On occasion, tigers seek out others outside the framework of mating, territorial defense, and mother/offspring relationships. They have been observed playing in neutral zones between territories, and particularly in captivity often make noisy, boisterous bids for attention from passers by. It is true that we cannot scientifically quantify how important the scent, sound, or spoor of other tigers are in a tiger's sense of social opportunity, but we also cannot—and should not—totally discount it as a quality of life issue.

Socialized tigers suddenly deprived of contact with cage mates or human keepers exhibit all the classical signs of grief, such as loss of appetite, listlessness, and may enter a terminal decline. Such a reaction to loss indicates a social dynamic transcending mere *tolerance*, a vital, ongoing *need*.

Courting tigers often show behaviors that include affection, play, and acts that can be loosely interpreted as flirting. This belies the long held assumption that the sex drive in tigers is a negative drive to be relieved rather than a positive drive to be enjoyed. It

would be at least inefficient and at most maladaptive to engage in behavior that increases negative drives rather than decreases them. In this sense it is clear that tigers have sexual behaviors that meet the Maslovian definition as love/belonging needs.

When grossly unfulfilled, love and belonging needs are felt as loneliness or grief.

Esteem needs: Among humans there are two versions of esteem needs - the need for respect and recognition by others, and the need for self-respect. Among tigers, it is easier to use the term *empowerment* to describe their esteem needs, directly reflecting the power they have to influence others and their environment. Tigers in the wild sort themselves out in dominant/submissive relationships and respond to challenges based upon their level of confidence, built upon natural ability and experience. They exercise discretion in how and when they perform certain activities. Although making allowances for a tiger's full esteem needs in captivity would be a challenge, there is one guideline that would improve captive husbandry immensely. To the greatest extent possible allow tigers to be tigers. Balance a human standard of health and cleanliness against a tiger's need to mark its territory and smell naturally. Provide a shelter where the tiger can reveal itself or stay concealed at will. Allow for a degree of self-determination by respecting a tiger's hesitance to perform certain activities "on cue" or to socialize with keepers strictly on human terms. Train, where called for, using rewards rather than punishments. Keep discipline constructive and as consistent as possible.

When grossly unfulfilled, esteem needs are felt as anxiety and may be exhibited as neurotic behavior up to and including self-mutilation.

Being needs:

Though the deficiency needs may be met and thereby cease to motivate, self-actualization and transcendence are "being" needs that provide an ongoing motivation even as they are satisfied.

To clearly identify all the being needs of a tiger will involve a great deal of research and ultimately will result in an imperfect understanding. We cannot define tests to fully measure these needs without a shared language. However we can clearly demonstrate the existence of this category of needs and thereby their importance in compassionate and effective captive management.

Self-actualization: This is the *instinctual* need to make the most of one's unique abilities, the intrinsic growth of what constitutes the organism. This applies more easily to tigers than it may seem at first glance, since the "self" is the unique combination of strengths and weaknesses, interests and apathies that make each creature different from all others. Individuality is deepened and broadened with each new experience that impacts one's self image and view of the world.

Tigers, like all cats, are notoriously curious about the world around them. Tigers will learn about things that have no practical value to their wellbeing. They seek out experiences that widen their perspective.

A mother extends the same care to her cubs that she received from her own mother. She shifts her perspective from being someone's daughter to being someone's mother and by using learned behavior in her caregiving demonstrates an understanding of motherhood that hints at the realization "they are what I was." While not discounting the role of parental instincts in tiger parenting, one also cannot discount that cubs raised without their natural mother do not exhibit complete and proper parental behavior toward their own offspring. What they learn becomes a part of who they are.

A cub has certain innate hunting abilities such as chasing, subduing and stalking. By instructing her young, a tigress helps them string the behaviors into an extended sequence that has a greater value than the sum of its parts. In assuming the role of provider, the formerly disjointed reactions a tiger had to things in its environment take on added significance. The tiger becomes a predator, and through practice achieves true excellence at its craft.

Self-transcendence: At the top of the triangle, self-transcendence is also sometimes referred to as spiritual needs. Viktor Frankl expresses the relationship between self-actualization and self-transcendence clearly in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He writes: "The true meaning of life is to be found in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system....Human experience is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualization."

Self-transcendence is the most difficult level of the Maslovian hierarchy to relate to tigers due primarily to observer prejudice. Since man first looked into the night sky and caught a glimpse of infinity, or watched the death of winter yield to the rebirth of spring, he has speculated about the great questions of existence: "Where do I fit in?" "Is there something greater out there?" Our habit of answering such questions with organized systems of religion clouds our ability to objectively study self-transcendence as a psychological phenomenon independent of its religious implications.

If one can set aside the special vocabulary used in organized religion, faith and worship take on broader meanings. "Faith" is confidence in a particular outcome of an unfinished process or making decisions based upon an assumption that cannot be verified. "Worship" is any relationship with the power to influence one's lifestyle (i.e. "worth-ship", its etymological root).

The world's great faiths are full of references to powerful distractions that we worship at the expense of worshipping the Godhead. Therefore there should be a consensus that worship is not strictly a theological construct. By omitting the special vocabulary used to set apart their secular feelings from their religious feelings, we find that Man's relationship with God is based upon gratitude, love, trust, expectation, and respect.

Tigers experience all those states, and it is not a broad stretch of the word “worship” to describe acts of restraint or even self-sacrifice.

As for the greatest of all great questions, where we fit into the grand scheme, that is an amplified concept of a normal routine with rules in which we follow certain rules, fulfill certain obligations, possess certain expectations, and realize that others have an integral place in it and likewise possess needs. Clearly one would not argue that tigers grasp the same level of abstractions humans exhibit when they refer to a “Kingdom of God” or “Universe.” Arguably tigers do have some concept of society, rules, and expectations—both their own expectations and the expectations of others. While the point of this exercise in semantics is not to imply that tigers possess a religion of sorts, it does indicate that self-transcendence is not an exclusive benefit of being human. As the ideal state for a captive animal, it should be the ultimate goal of enlightened captive management.

This need, when grossly unfulfilled, may not directly impact conservation breeding, exhibition, or entertainment. However the moral implications we set aside to consider self-transcendence as applicable to tigers must be donned once again. When we bring animals into the world for our own purposes, we owe them contentment and happiness. It would be inconceivable to imagine truly compassionate captive management without honoring an animal’s need to reach its full potential.

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