

WHY ARE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE HAPPIER?

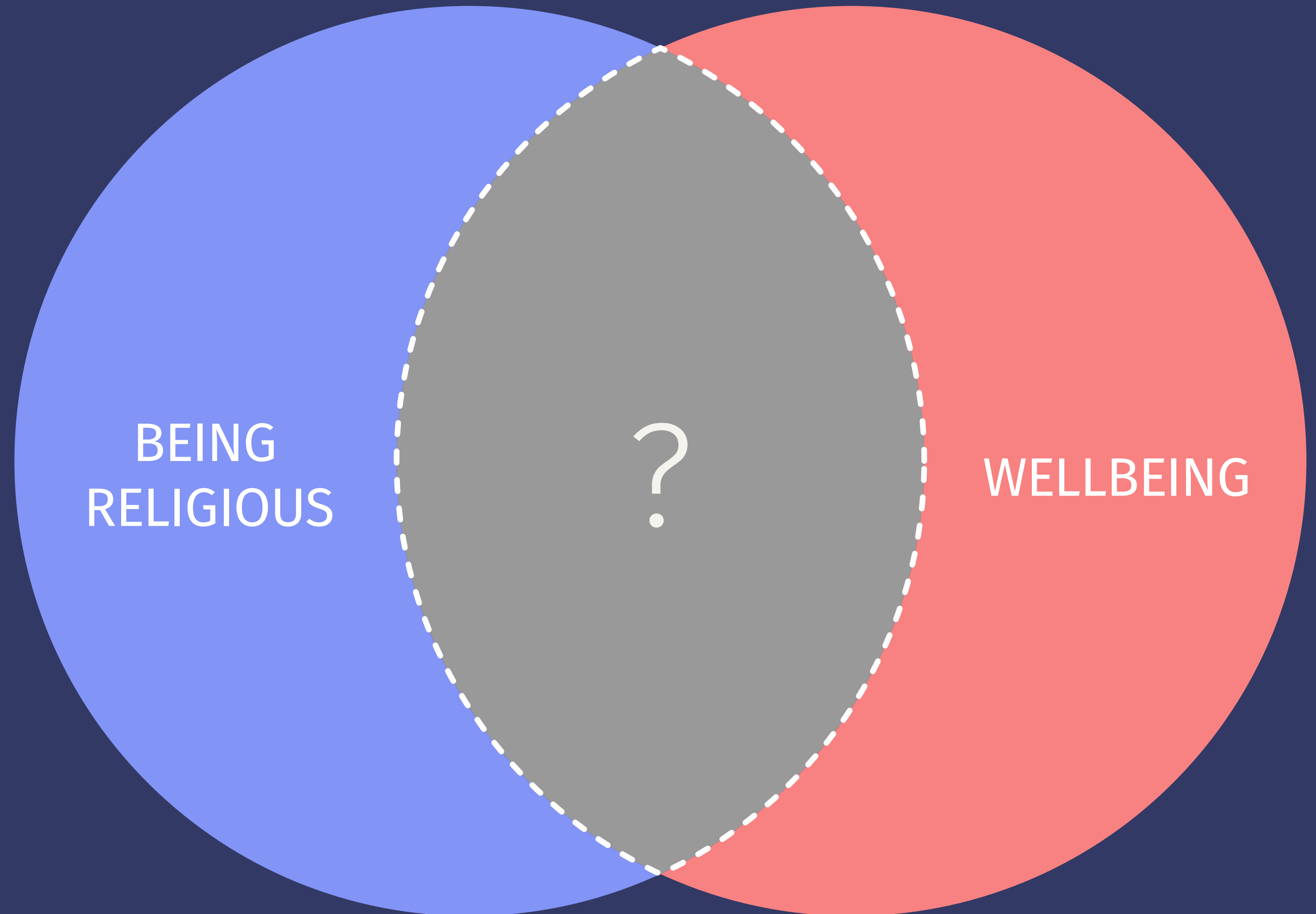
Decades of research
have shown that religious
people are often happier
than non-believers.

But why? Is it personal
growth? Community?
Meaning? Hope?



RESEARCHERS HAVE STRUGGLED TO EXPLAIN THIS LINK.

For example, past studies¹ have shown that 20% of the link between wellbeing and being religious is explained by personal growth. But that still leaves most of the relationship unexplained.



PRIMAL WORLD BELIEFS

As beliefs researchers, we set out to test whether primal world beliefs—often shortened to “**primals**”—could explain why humans fundamentally disagree about the state of the world. These beliefs reflect deep expectations about the nature of the world—whether it is safe or dangerous, beautiful or ugly.



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ALL 26 PRIMALS ARE THOUGHT TO BE LENSES AS TO HOW WE SEE THE WORLD.

For example, looking at the “safe” world belief, a study found that people who view the world as “dangerous” estimated major threats at rates **420% higher** than those who see it as “safe.”

Notably, people who viewed the world as safe made more accurate estimates overall.²



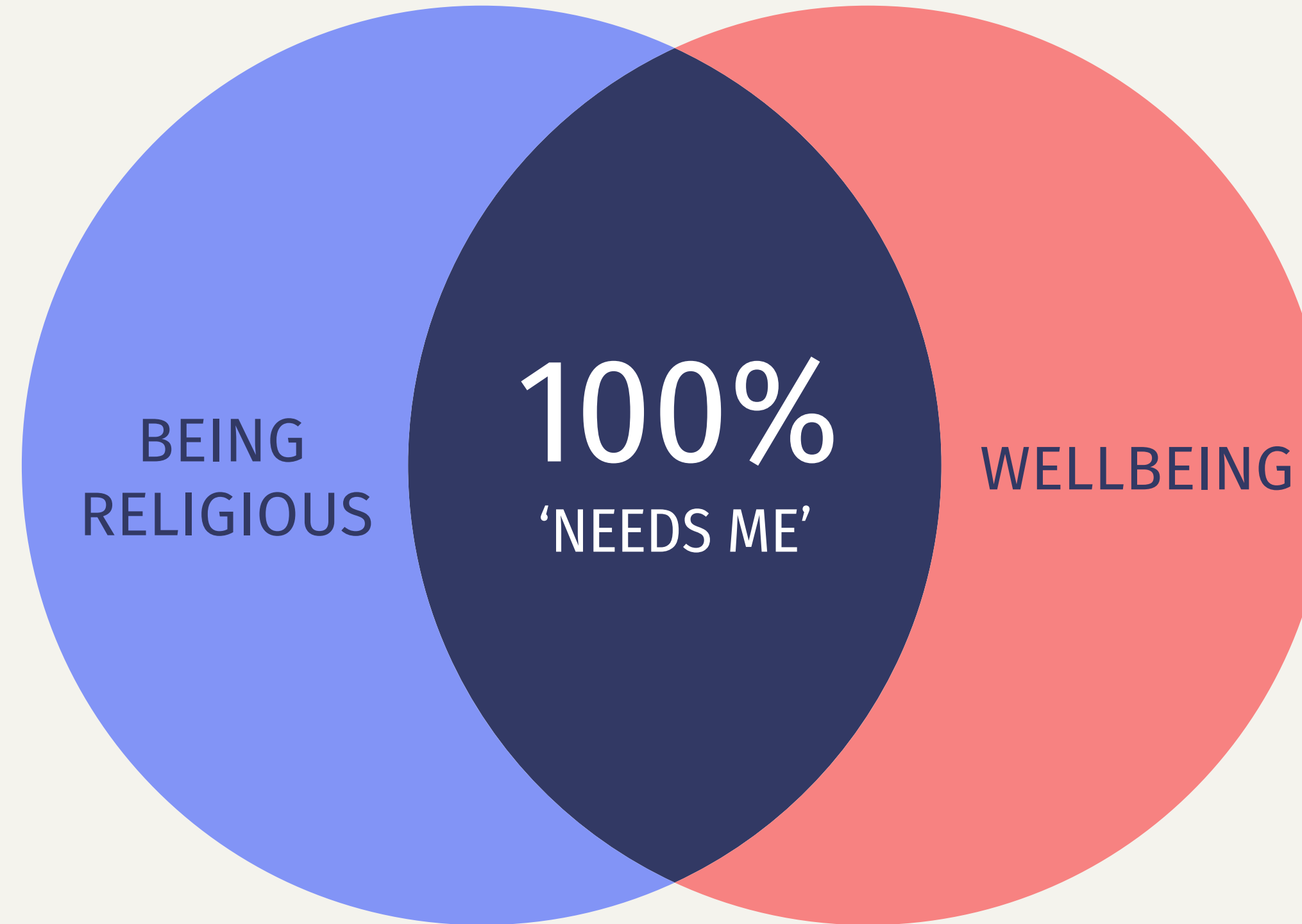
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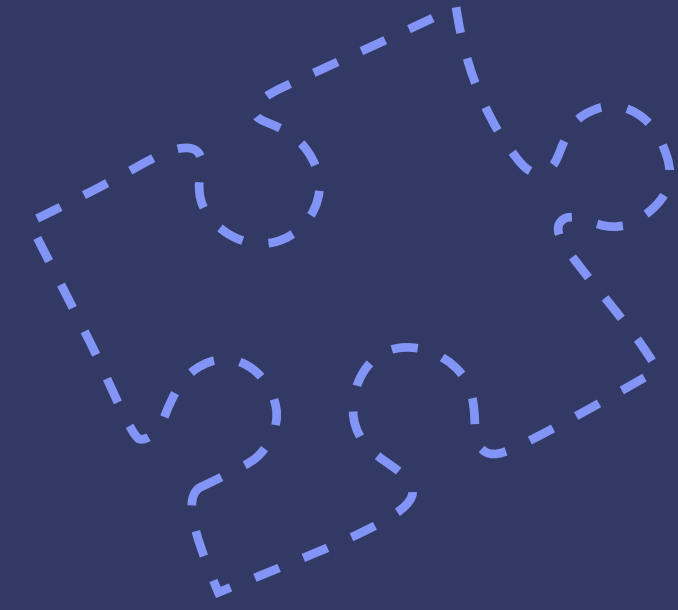
A new study of 8 different samples — 3,345 people total— found that

ONE PRIMAL WORLD BELIEF STATISTICALLY EXPLAINED THE ENTIRE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND WELLBEING.³

If you are a religious person who sees the world as a place that doesn't need them, you get NONE of the average wellbeing benefits of being religious.

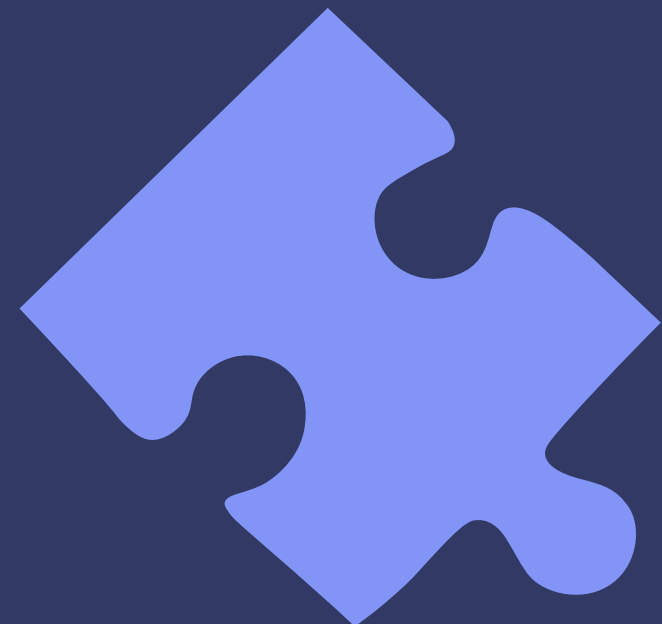
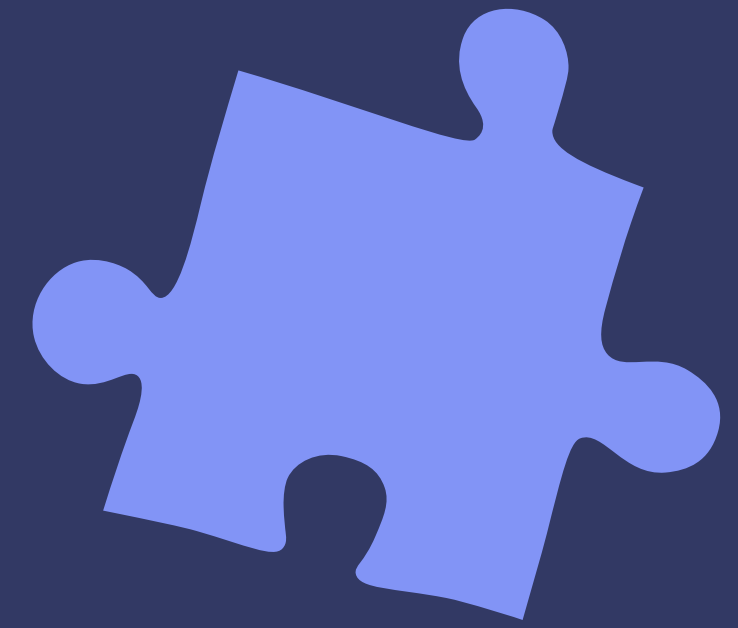
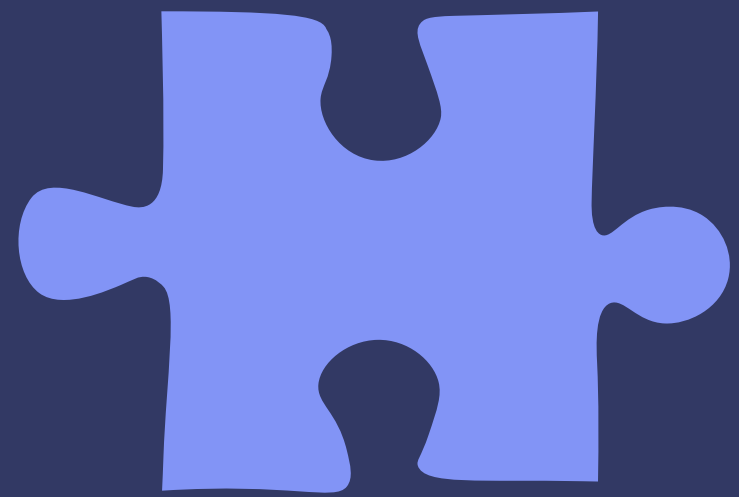


If you are a nonreligious person who does see the world as a place that needs them, you get 100% of the average wellbeing benefits of being religious.



HUMANS THRIVE ON BEING NEEDED.

The primal world belief “needs me” reflects the sense that the universe is like a jigsaw puzzle with one specific piece missing—and that you are that piece. It’s the belief that you have a meaningful role to play, and that your contribution is not interchangeable in the cold mechanics of the world.





IS THIS BELIEF ARROGANT? SEVERAL STUDIES SAY NO.

“One of my strongest primals is the belief that the world needs me. Not because I think I am more important than anyone else, but because I have been entrusted with a unique set of skills and experiences that, held with care, might serve something larger than myself. This belief calls me forward, urging me to bring the fullness of what I’ve been given to bear, in the hope of leaving the world—however slightly—better than I found it.”

ALIA CRUM

STANFORD PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY, AUTHOR, SPEAKER

A NEW PATH TO WELLBEING

If you are religious, there may be ways to deepen your practice that strengthen the belief that the world needs you.

If you are not religious, there is good news: you do not need to become religious to experience this benefit. Non-religious people often feel needed as well—and show the same wellbeing advantages.

This primal world belief that the world “needs me” can be cultivated through reflection, service, and meaningful roles such as volunteering, caregiving, mentoring, or creative work.



Do you see the world as a place that needs you?
How do you compare to others?

FIND OUT AT MYPRIMALS.COM

1. Fatima, S., Sharif, S., & Khalid, I. (2018). How does religiosity enhance psychological well-being? Roles of self-efficacy and perceived social support. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 10(2), 119–127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000168>
2. Kerry, N. & Clifton, J. D. W. (2026). From bear attacks to neutral faces, dangerous world belief uniquely predicts elevated perception of threat. *Journal of Individual Differences*. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000458>.
3. Kerry, N., Lin, H., & Clifton, J. D. W. (2025). Belief that the world Needs Me statistically explains the relationship between religiosity and subjective wellbeing among Americans. *Journal of Positive Psychology*. 10.1080/17439760.2025.2587058

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