

Positive Psychology – Lecture 4

Hi everybody. We are the Harvard Callbacks We have a special Valentine's Day message dedicated from the teaching staff to the students. <http://v.163.com>

I will never find another lover sweeter than you, sweeter than you I will never find another lover more precious than you, more precious than you Coz you are Close to me you're like my mother, Close to me you're like my father, Close to me you're like my sister, Close to me you're like my brother You are the only one my everything and for you this song I sing All my life I pray for someone like you I thank God that I, that I finally found you And I pray that you do love me too Pray that you do love me too Happy Valentine's Day!

Hi, morning. You know, when I asked them to dedicate this song, I had a slightly different song in mind. But-- so be it. We do love you. What we are going to talk about today, continuing from last time is or are the basic premises of this course-- where we are coming from, where we are going-- laying down in many ways, the foundation of the spiral that we are going to create for the next semester together. Last time we stopped, we talked about how difficult change is. We talked about the Twin studies that illustrate that what Lykken and Tellegen said-- maybe changing our happiness level is as difficult as-- and futile-- as trying to change our height. And we talked about the error of the average and the mistake that these researchers are making, misunderstanding the nature of change. Because if someone changes, the question is no longer "is it possible to change" but rather "how is it possible to change". And then we talked about the Somerville Cambridge study that show that literally the Rolls-Royce of interventions failed-- 5 years with the leading scientists, researchers, psychiatrists, psychologists from Cambridge, Harvard and MIT, putting their minds and hearts for good intentions to bring about change-- failure. Not only they have failed in bringing about positive change, they actually brought about negative change.

Remember?-- Alcoholism rates went up for the intervention group, compared to the control group. The control group that joined no intervention actually were more luckily to advance in their workplace 20, 30 years later. So change is difficult, but then we went over and said, "Well, Marva Collins creates change. So it is possible. Programs by Martin Seligman and Karen Reivich and numerous others succeeding in bringing about change". And the challenge then is, for us, if our goal is to become practical idealists is to understand what it is that brings about change and then do it. Spread the word. Spread the word about the research. Even if the research doesn't always communicate good news, it's about communicating what works, what is real, as opposed to our dreams, our desires, our hopes, our wishes-- that's not enough. Good will, idealism, good intentions are not enough. We need to be grounded in research. And this is very much what Maslow has in mind when he talked about the analogous Manhattan Project, where scientists, positive psychologists or that time psychologists, social scientists would get together and pick out the tip of the stem-- the few ideas, the few programs that work and then replicate them. Study the best and as one of the students here, Mariam -- came to me after the class and she said, "the tip of the stem is actually about democratizing excellence." I love that phrase.

Democratizing excellence-- studying the best and applying it to the rest of us. Ok, so we have this grand scheme, grand idea by Maslow to create a Manhattan-type Project. But what if I'm not interested in going into one of these projects? What if I'm not even interested in becoming an academic? Just want to do things on my own: Can I make a difference? And the answer is absolutely yes. One of the most significant barriers to people doing things in the world, to actually introducing change is that they underestimate their ability to bring about change. There is a lot of research in psychology. Primarily the people who started are Emerson and Moscovici and many others who have done research showing how minority-- very often one person can make a big difference, can make a significant difference. Ralph Waldo Emerson: "All

history is a record of the power of minorities, and of minorities of one, "-- a lot to backed that up in social science research. Margaret Mead, the anthropologist: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." All change begins in the mind of single person or a small group." And then it expands. Now the question is "how does it expand" and "why is it so difficult for us to understand, accept, assimilate and live according to the fact that we can make a difference, if we understand that what we need to understand is how change happens. Change happens exponentially. Our connection to other people and their connection to others and so and so create an exponential function which explains for an example-- that those of you are familiar with-- "butterfly effect" how a butterfly flapping its wings in Singapore can theoretically cause a tornado in Florida. Because on particle hits another and another and another.

It also explains the phenomenal 6 degrees of separation: how we are all connected and interconnected in a web potentially of goodness. To illustrate the exponential nature of human networks, let's look at smiles. What do we know from research is that smiles are contagious. Someone smiles-- makes you smile. You smile-- you make someone smile. And so on and so on. You know, even some goes pass you on the street and you don't smile ostensibly you don't smile-- there are certain micro-muscles in your face that are moving that actually make you feel better. So smiles are contagious. Now if you smiled to-- or make three people smile, and these three people-- each one makes three other people smile. And those nine people make three-- each one-- three other people smile. Within 20 degrees of separation from you initial smile to the three people, the entire world will be smiling. Exponential nature of social networks. The same with making other people feel good-- complimenting people. If you make three people-- or even better, four people a day feel good and they make-- they pay it forward and make four others feel good,

and so on and so on. Within very little time, the whole world will be made to feel better. This is the nature of an exponential function. So smiles and laughter are contagious. And to illustrate, I want to show you a quick video. (Spanish) (The sentence shown on the screen at the end, "Difícil, eh?" means "Difficult, isn't it?") Alright. I have to see this one more time.

Sorry. So the theme of the class today is babies. We are going to see another one soon. So let's understand: what is the nature of exponential function so that we can understand the power of one? I'm looking for someone to make a deal with me. Here is the deal: What I am going to do is ask you-- this is all voluntary, you don't have to do it-- here's the deal. I am going to ask you to give me each day-- or rather I'm going to give you, whoever signs the deal with me, 1000 dollars every single day for the next 30 days. And what you will give me in return is on the first day, one cent-- one penny; on the second day, two cents; third day, 4 cents... Every day, twice as much as the previous day, starting with one. Who would like to make this deal with me? Again, every day I give you for the next 30 days 1000 dollars. What you'll do is every day for the next 30 days give me one cent, next day two, four, eight and so on.

Anyone? Any takers? One. Looking for some more. So that's 30000 down for me. Anymore? Ok, good. Alright. So here's the deal. Here is what will happen. On the 30th day, I will give you another 1000 dollars-- you'll have a total of 30000 dollars from me. On the 30th day, I will be getting from you in total, including the first 29 days-- no, rather on the 30th day, I'll be getting from you 5,368,709 dollars and 12 cents. Double that, times by two, this is the money I will be making in one month. One cent on the first, two on the second, and so on. For most people, it seems extraordinary because people don't understand the nature of exponential function and therefore don't understand the nature of the power of one. Here is another example. Just kidding. I'll let you off the hook. Another example. This captured my

imagination-- when I was a kid, my dad told me about the invention of the chess game-- some of you know the story. So the inventor of the chess game-- he was in India, and went to the local king. The king was very impressed with the game and said, "How can I reward you?" And the chess player said, "No, it's OK really." The king said, "No. I want to reward you. How can I reward you?" So the inventor of the chess game said, "Ok. What I like is on the first block, first square, I would like one grain of rice. On the second, I'd like two grains of rice. On the third, four grains of rice and so on and so on. That's my request." And the king said, "Are you sure that's all you want? I'm prepared to give you a lot. This is a wonderful game." And the inventor said, "Yes." So the king told his assistant to go and get the man, give the man his wish. When they started to calculate how much rice would be needed to fill up all blocks, all the way to 2 to the power 63. They realized that the rice could fill up the entire world with a thick layer. Again, misleading-- fail to understand it because we don't understand the nature of exponential change.

Another-- last one. So how many times do you think-- you all have a piece of paper in front of you-- how many times do you think you need to roll over the piece of paper for the piece of paper to reach the moon? The moon, 240,000 miles away from us. How many times do you need to fold the piece of paper so that you can reach the moon. 41 times. So if you can have a piece of paper here, and you fold it 41 times by the end of the class, you can reach the moon. I don't know why they make such a big deal out of the person landing on the moon. Seems quite simple to me. And here is the point. We underestimate our capacity to affect change. Because we underestimate the growth of exponential function. We are influencing people and the world every minute of our lives. The question though is in which direction are we going to do it. Are we going to be a force for change? Be deliberate? Be practical idealists? Or just have the good intentions without the effort that's necessary to bring about a positive exponential function. The final project for this course, as you know is a presentation

that you'll give whether it's for the (?) students or the extension school students. You'll be giving a lecture to other people. And when we put together the class, this is precisely what we thought about: how you affect change and those people whom you change will hopefully influence others and so on and so on. In many ways, the idea was taken from the film "Pay it Forward". What I want to do now is show you a quick excerpt-- just the coming soon of "Pay it Forward", for those of you who haven't seen it. Because in "Pay it Forward", they capture this very idea of human networks as exponential functions. We underestimate our capacity to effect change because we underestimate the growth of an exponential function. What if the world is just a big disappointment? Unless you take the things that you don't like about this world and you flip them upside down and you can start that today.

That's me. And that's three people. And I'm going to help them. And they do it for three other people. And they do it for three more. It has to be something really big. Something they can do by themselves. is it possible let one idea to change the world. Lost your car? That's a keen observation. I can help you. You are giving me a brand new Jaguar and you don't want anything. Call it generosity between two strangers. What did you tell my son to make him bring homeless man into my house? I've got a story, Ok? A senior partner of Chandler and Moss is giving away new cars? Just pay it forward. Three big favors for three other people. You can't just put two people together and make them like each other. It's the one. Pay it forward. Pay it forward. Just like the idea. You could fix a person. Do you want to come in and stay? - It's just complicated. - Come in. Supposed to be something hard. I don't care about your burns, Eugene, if that's even what they are. Is that what they are? I can't. So sorry. Don't tell me how sorry you are for me. Maybe you are scared to get rejected; well, I can't reject you, you're too quick for me! Are you still going to pay it forward? Give her another chance for me. You will miss! I wanna wear the (?) dress. No, you smell good! - Are you sure?

- Yeah, yeah! Pay it forward is a movement in LA, Mrs. McKenney.

Come on!

- A movement? So you are like flunk us if we don't change the world? You might just scrape by with a C. Impact three people. Each impact three others and three others. Within 20 degrees of separation. You can change the world, the entire world. Premise number 3: . internal factors versus external factors. There is a lot of research showing how difficult it is to change happiness based on external factors. Research on subjective wellbeing-- the term that psychologists use to capture happiness essentially has been going on for very, very long time. Until recently, most of the research was conducted, was done using questionnaires. And many people rightfully so questioned the veracity, the value of these questionnaires, because it is subjective-- are we measuring something real? Over the last few years, what started to happen is more and more psychologists have been using brain scans for example; they've been using fMRIs, EEGs, other physiological measures. And what they found interestingly is that there is a very high correlation between the "objective" measures such as brain scans, such as EEGs, such as fMRI, such as physiological measures and people's evaluation of their wellbeing-- in other words, subjective levels of happiness. Very high correlation between the two which in many ways gives credence to the many years of research that has been conducted, before we have the technology to do it in a more sophisticated way. So the research I am going to share with you-- some of it is taken using the brain scans, other is self-evaluation. But again, both are meaningful as well as valuable.

We'll get more into the way that the research is conducted when we talk about phenomenon such as meditation. Or people like Richie Davidson actually scanned the brain and showed significant changes as a result of an 8-week meditation program. Or people like a very young Joshua Greene, who does a research on morality and shows

that we have morality centers in our brain. So it's becoming much more sophisticated, much more interesting and the interesting thing about it is that it verifies a lot of the research that has been done to date with far less sophisticated means, such as self-rapport. Research done by Daniel Gilbert who teaches Psych1 on effective forecasting.

Here is one of his studies. So what he did was go to professors who were just before either getting the tenure decision: so either they were going to get the tenure or not. And he asked them, "How happy are you going to be, if you get the tenure?" And they said, "Ecstatic! This is something I've working on for many years and this will be it. This will be a dream come true." And-- "How happy are you going to stay for?" And they said, "For the rest of our lives. Because this is something we've been working for very long time. It will make everything so much easier. I can get off the publish-or-parish race. I can enjoy my work much more. This is going to transform my life." And he asked them, "What happens if you don't get tenure? If you are rejected?" And they said, "We are going to be devastated. This is something we've been working for many, many years." And-- "How long are you going to be devastated for?" "Probably until we get tenure somewhere else. But even then, that may not be enough."-- Because once you don't get tenure in one place, you don't go up in terms of the ranking of the school-- you very often would get tenure but elsewhere, school that is not considered as good as the one where you were rejected. So it will be devastating for a very long time. And Gilbert went to them at the moment when they got the tenure decision. Some of them got them. Others did not. "How are you feeling?" He asked. Those who got it, "Ecstatic! Happiest we've ever been." And-- "How long are you going to stay happy for?" "For the rest of our lives. We've made it." And then he went to those who didn't get tenure and asked them, "How are you feeling?" They were devastated. And they were sure that they were going to remain devastated for a very long time.

And he went back to see them three months later, six months later. And what Gilbert and his colleagues found was that almost to the person, those who got tenure or did not get tenure went back to their previous level of wellbeing: If they were happy before, they were happy six months hence; if they were unhappy before, regardless whether they get tenure or not, they were not happy. In other words, it looks like this and went back to base level or; it looks like this and back to base level. They did the same with lottery winners. "What if you really win ten million dollars, will it actually make you happier?" Yes-- for a while, but not for long. Philip Brickman, Northwestern University did this research.

After within 6 months, people go back to their base level of wellbeing. People in serious accidents with their paralysis as the result of the accident, very often, usually-- again, this is all the average-- go back to their base level of happiness: if they are happy before, they will be happy one year after; if they are unhappy, they will remain unhappy. Extreme circumstances make very little difference to our wellbeing. University of Illinois professor Ed Diener does a lot of research on happiness levels. He has been doing it since the 1970s. What he shows-- he and others including Daniel Kahneman, Nobel prize winner-- show is that wealth matters very little to our levels of wellbeing. Just like the lottery would make a very little difference to our wellbeing. Now this does not mean that a person who doesn't have enough food, someone who is homeless on the streets here, gets an extra thousand or two thousand dollars a month-- that of course will make him or her much happier. But beyond the basic needs, once our basic needs are met and that means food, shelter, basic education. Once those needs are met, income makes very little difference. No change across generations. Our generation is much wealthier than our parents, much, much wealthier than our grandparents' generation. We are not happier. And that is global

whether it's China, whether it's in the UK or Australia, or the United States.

Levels of happiness are essentially static; and anxiety levels and depression levels, as we talked about in the first class have gone up significantly. So income levels make very little difference. In general, external circumstances make very little difference. I mean, think about your own experience: how did you feel-- go back, just transport yourself to experience of getting into Harvard, getting this big package in the mail which said "You were accepted" on April 1 or the end of December, when you got this pack-- how did you feel? Probably ecstatic. Probably one of your highlights. And that moment, if you are like me, you thought, "This is it. I'm really going to be happy for a very long time. Cos I really struggled in high school-- a lot of it was difficult; a lot of it was painful, but it was all worth it. I made it." And you went along with that feeling the next day, because in school they started to talk about how you got in. And you felt fantastic about it, right? And you felt great probably for the rest of the senior year-- I mean, still ups and downs; but overall, high levels of happiness. And it was going to last for the rest of your life. And you came here-- Freshmen week, you knew it was going to last for the rest of your life. Because you were around wonderful people. It was fun. There were parties. And you said, "Everything they said about Harvard was not true. It's actually a party school." You were certain of that, right? And not only was it a party school, you were going to have an amazing time for the four years and beyond. Because your life was transformed by this letter of acceptance, right? Things started to change probably on the first day of class, but not entirely-- because there's shopping period and it's such a wonderful thing-- you shop for classes. It's even better than going to the mall-- so many, 3000 classes to choose from. And this second week of Harvard is fantastic and it was going to continue just that way, constant tide for the rest of your life. And then suddenly things begin to change. Slightly. Ever so slightly. And they completely change once your first paper is due or the midterms arrive. And you go back to your base level of wellbeing.

If you experience a lot of stress in high school and elementary school and were

unhappy, generally the best predictor would say that you would feel the same way a month into your Harvard experience. External circumstances matter very little. Very little. In fact, also, place of residents makes very little difference. People think, " Well, if I move-- especially in the day-light-- if I move to California, I'll be happier, right?" Wrong. Californians are no happier than people in Massachusetts. Initially when we go to a warm place, we feel the relief and there's this spiky level of wellbeing. But very quickly we go back to our base level exactly where we were before. I'll take this even a step further, even though there is no research about this, I bet you this is correct: there is no difference in our levels of wellbeing if our place of residents is by the river or in the (?). This is really taking the theory far, but it's true. I love this T-shirt-- what? If you can't run with the big dogs, stay in yard. Anyone from Korea here? Alright. You made it all the way on such a cold day. Well done! I appreciated it. How spoiled we get here. Makes very little difference. Very little difference-- where we are, where we live, income levels, lottery, tenure, getting into our dream college, getting our dream job for you seniors-- you may have just gotten it. Yeah, you are going to have a spike in your level of wellbeing-- I'm sure you had a spike in your level of wellbeing when you got this acceptance letter, but very quickly we go back to our base level. One thing that does matter to our base level of wellbeing which is external circumstance is democracy versus oppression. People living in democracies are generally significantly happier than people living in dictatorships.

Women, for example, living in places where they are oppressed are in general less happy than women living in free countries. People living in Darfur are certainly less happy than people living in Denmark or the United States. But again, these are the extreme circumstance that do make a difference, such as I said, a homeless person, of course, income will make a difference to that person. Moving to a free country, of course, will make a difference to their wellbeing. But beyond the extremes, additions or subtractions to our external circumstances make very little difference. Now this is

good news and bad news. The bad news is it seems like whatever we do, it doesn't matter. So why am I working hard in order to get that BCG job? why did I work so hard in order to get into this place?

If it doesn't matter, if I experience this ups and downs. And the answer is that-- yes it won't make a difference to our wellbeing but it also doesn't mean that we cannot increase our level of wellbeing. Many people said the problem with general levels of happiness or unhappiness rather, the cause is people have too high expectations. And if we lower our expectations, we lower our stress levels and we will enjoy life more. "Ok, so I don't care if I don't get a B in the course. I'd be much happier if I don't care, if I lower my levels of expectation. I don't care what I get into, what job I have, I just want to be happy." And you'll probably be happy. Slightly happy if you lower your levels of expectations, but not in the long term. And we'll talk about it next week. Not in the long term. The problem is not lower these high expectations-- that doesn't matter. The problem is right versus wrong expectations. Not lower high expectations-- that won't make a difference to our levels of wellbeing. What will make a difference to our levels of wellbeing is if we have right vs. wrong expectations. It is wrong expectation to expect that getting into a certain place, getting a raise, finding our dream partner, is responsible for our happiness. Moving to California or to (Forts Heimer?). That in and of itself will not make us happier. That's wrong expectation. The right expectation is to believe in change from within. So these things will not make us happy. In fact, our readiness and potential to experience happiness is mostly depended on our state of mind, not on our status, or the states of our bank account.

It's about changing our perception-- state of mind. It's about changing our interpretation of the world, of what's happening to us, of our achievements, of our failures. It's about what we choose to perceive, what we choose to focus on. It's about transformation, as opposed to the external information or the external success. 1504--

this whole course, is about this transformation, as I mentioned during the first lesson. I want to move on to the fourth premise, one of the most important premises in this course. And in many ways, we can understand human intellectual history just based on this idea: should we accept human nature? Or can we perfect it? And can it change? This work relies on-- or these ideas rely on the work of Thomas Sowell. Thomas Sowell, Harvard class of 58, now at Stanford, the Hoover Institute, one of my intellectual heroes. And what he does and what his work does is basically explain why people choose to back one political party versus the other; why they choose to live one kind of life versus the other. This single book helped me understand myself better as well as other people better-- whether it's politically, whether it's psychologically, whether it's philosophically. Those of you who are interested in politics and there is one book you want to read, after you read Marva Collins of course, it's this. So what does Thomas Sowell say?

Essentially what he does is divide people into two camps those who hold constrained vision, the limited vision; and those who hold the unconstrained, the unlimited vision of human nature. People who hold constrained vision of human nature, believe that human nature cannot be changed; it's immutable-- we have certain instincts, we have certain inclinations. They are fixed. This is it. What you see is what you get. What you are born with or were born with, as species, is all we have. The flaws that are out there are inevitable-- they cannot be changed. We need to accept them for what they are. That's the only thing we can do with these flaws. And people who have the constrained vision think that our instincts, our inclinations, our basic nature is immutable, accepted. And then what they do, rather than resign, they channel it. How do they channel it? By building certain political institutions that would channel the flawed, imperfect human nature toward the good. Philosophers and psychologists who fall under the constrained vision create them, philosophies and psychologies and institutions and systems to channel our flawed and imperfect nature.

People who fall under the constrained vision in the history of ideas, are people such as Alexander Hamilton, Adam Smith-- those of you are taking or will take EC 10, ?, Fredrick Kayak. These are people who say, "our nature is constrained. It's limited." Edmund Burke-- another one. What captures this idea best-- the words of Francis Bacon, considered the father of the scientific movement, was a philosopher in 1600s: "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed." Whether it's physical nature, or human nature. We need to obey it. It is what it is. Now we have the unconstrained vision. Perhaps you are a little bit more optimistic, a little bit more utopian-- human nature can be improved. It can be changed. It is up to us to do so. It is perfectable. We don't need to accept these flaws as inevitable. We can perfect it. There are solutions to these flaws, to these imperfections and our role-- the goal of institutions, whether it's political institutions, educational institutions, of systems, organizations, individual philosophers, psychologists, the role is to change our nature, to perfect it, to better it. Philosophers who help this position: people like Thomas Jefferson, people like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, George Bernard Shaw, Ronald Dworkin and other leading thinkers.

And what Thomas Sowell did was map the entire intellectual history of world showing how people who held this view versus that view, that two radically different political prescriptions. The person who best captures the unconstrained view, Benjamin Constant, French philosopher and politician, "It is for self-perfectioning that destiny calls us." Generally people on constrained view, are people politically, not always, but usually people who would support capitalism-- people like Adam Smith, who talked about "invisible hand"-- Let's channel imperfect, perhaps flawed human nature toward the good. People who are more on the unconstrained vision would tend toward Utopianism or sometimes communism. Not always, but sometimes. Why? Because let's change human nature. Self-interest is not good. It hurts in the long term and therefore, we need to change it rather than the constrained vision-- people who

said, "We may not like it, but it is what it is. We cannot change it. Let's make the best of it and channel it toward the good." Two radical views. Two radical prescriptions based on people's notion perspective. So why am I telling you this? This is not a political science class. Because it has every relevance to psychology as well. It has every relevance to psychology: Do we perceive reality, human nature as constrained or unconstrained will ultimately affect our psychology. And this is very meaningful and important.

Let me explain. Now first of all, some people who have the constrained view when it comes to politics, have the unconstrained view when it comes to psychology, so it is not always consistent, though it very often is. So the vision of psychology this course promotes is the constrained view. In other words, my belief-- and I am going to back that up with research today and for the next semester-- is human nature is fixed. We have inclinations. We have certain instincts that are there and have been formed either God-given or evolutionary-given for millions of years that have been formed. They are not going to change any time soon. Not in our life time. It's fixed. We are stuck with them through good and ill. And all we can do after we accept this nature is to first understand it through research, and then after we understand it, make the best use of it. Understand it through research as well as through the search-- through introspection, and then make the best use of it. How can I channel my nature?

And what I want to do now is illustrate a case study of what I mean by nature constrained and why it is so important for happiness, for wellbeing, for long-term success to have the constrained view of human nature when it comes to our psychology that is. The topic I want to talk about is the permission to be human. I am going to talk about this topic for three reasons. A, because it illustrates what Thomas Sowell means politically in the psychological realm. Second, because I think it is one of the most important pillars of wellbeing and happiness. The third reason why I want

to talk about it is because it gets to misunderstanding that many people have regarding what positive psychology is and is not. When I first started teaching this course and had six students, I remember one day sitting in Leverett House, having lunch by myself and one of the students comes in and says, "can I join you?" "Sure." we have lunch. And he says to me, "Tal, I hear you teaching a class on happiness." And I said to him, "Yes. That's right." And he said, "You know, my roommates are taking your class." And I said, "That's wonderful." There were two of the six. And he said, "But Tal, you've got to watch out now." And I said to him, "Why?" And he said, "Tal, you'll have to be careful." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because if I see you unhappy, I'll tell them." The next day in class, I used that and I said to the students, "You know, the last thing in the world that I want you to think is that I experience a constant high or that you, by the end of the semester or the year-- it was a year course, you-- by the end of the year-- will experience a constant high."

There are two kinds of people, who experience this constant high, who don't experience painful emotions such as anger, or envy, or disappointment, or sadness, or unhappiness, or depression, or anxiety at times-- two kinds of people who don't experience these painful emotions: the one kind are the psychopaths-- by definition they don't experience these painful emotions; the second kind of people who don't experience these painful emotions are dead people. Exactly! So you know, if you experience these emotions, it's a good sign. You are not a psychopath, and you are alive. However, in our culture today, we don't give ourselves the permission to be human, the freedom to experience these painful emotions as well. And we pay a very high price for this inability, for this refusal to accept the fact that it is part of human nature that is constrained, that is there no matter what. As kids, as babies-- going back to the baby's scene, we give ourselves the permission to be human, we know that it's natural. We don't even think about it in fact, to experience the high and then the low and high and then low. And later on, when we stop giving ourselves the permission to

be human when the (?) become so important, we begin to realize that other people are watching us and evaluating us constantly and we think they do so much more than they actually do. That's when we stop giving ourselves the permission to be human, and we pay a price, in terms of our energy levels, of our wellbeing, of our happiness, of our creativity, and ultimately also our success. Let me give an example of someone who does give himself the permission to be human. The Permission to be Human Now I'm saying we should look like this.

But what I am saying is that we all need a space, a place in our own lives where we give ourselves the permission to be human, whether it's with close friends, people we care about, whether it's first and foremost with ourselves when we write a journal, where we do give ourselves the permission to be, to cry, to be joyous-- because if we don't, we pay a price. We need a space of unconditional acceptance. The best advice that I got, or that we got-- my wife and I got when David, our first son was born from our pediatrician, Dr. Tok Shapiro-- and David was born at 1 AM in the morning and around 8 AM in the morning, he came in to see, to check up on my wife, to check up on the baby, for some reason, he didn't check up on me. And everything was fine. As he is leaving the room, he turned around and said, " Just one more thing. over the next few months, you are going to be experiencing every single kind of emotion to the extreme and that's fine. It's natural. We all go through it." And he walked out. It was the best advice that my wife and I got regarding child-rearing. Why?

Let me give you an example. So after about a month, I started to, once in a while, experience some envy toward David. Because here he was for the first time in-- well, since my wife and I were together-- someone else is getting much more attention than I was, no matter how much I cried. And I felt envy toward him and five minutes later, I experienced this most intense love toward him-- the emotion that I haven't felt before. Now normally I would think, "what a hypocrite! It's just something is wrong:

one minute you are envious and the next minute you experience love?" There is nothing wrong. There is everything right. It's part of being human. And because I had Dr.Shapiro's voice at back of my mind-- permission to be human, that helped me a great deal-- experience the envy when I experienced it, accept it; and then enjoy and celebrate it-- the positive emotions that I experienced toward David. Permission to be human. You see, there is actually a paradox playing-- this is work done by our very own Daniel Wegner on ironic processing. When we suppress a natural phenomenon, that phenomenon only strengthens.

Let me illustrate through an experiment. So for the next ten seconds, do not think of a pink elephant. For the next ten seconds, do not think of a pink elephant. You know the one that I am talking about? With the big ears, Dumbo? Do not think of a pink elephant for the next three seconds and I am sure no one thought of a pink elephant right? What happened? -- Most people thought of a pink elephant. Because when we try to suppress a natural phenomenon such as having a visual of the word when we say it, that thing just intensifies. The same applies to the painful emotions that are natural. And when we try to suppress them, they strengthen. When I started to teach after hearing about Marva Collins and deciding teaching is my calling, I knew that I had to deal with the problem-- the problem is that I am introvert, I get very nervous in front of audiences and large audiences for me is anything but five. But I had to deal with it and I knew I would have to deal with it. So I would go on in front of audience and before that I would say to myself, "Tal, don't be nervous. Don't be anxious. No anxiety today. Don't be nervous. Don't be nervous. Don't!" And what happened?-- Pink elephants all around. Instead after especially reading about paradoxical intentions by Victor Frankl, I started to give myself the permission to be human. And now when I go into a lecture, the nervousness-- because I give myself the permission to be human-- goes away within as little as three hours into the lecture. But no, it's managable. I still get nervous before every single lecture, which is actually

a good thing. But it's manageable. I can deal with it. I can handle it. Permission to be human.

You see, rejecting our nature leads to suboptimal performance emotionally as well as in terms of external performance. Imagine waking up every morning and saying to yourself: "I refuse to accept the law of gravity. This law of gravity is such a pain. You need to walk down the stairs and then up the stairs. I just want to float to Sanders (Sanders Theatre) in the morning. I just want to float to the dining hall after-- so much easier, so much less painful." Imagine leading a life like this. Will you truly refuse to accept the law of gravity? What kind of life would you lead? Well, first of all, you may not survive for long, if you truly don't accept the fact that things, people being no exception fall when left in mid-air. But even if you do survive-- let's the ground floor-- even if you do survive, you would lead a life of constant frustration-- refusing to accept something that is there whether you like it or not.

So instead we accept the law of gravity. More than that, we create games around the law of gravity. I mean all those of you doing sports here-- and it's most of you in this room who are doing athletics, who go for a run, you rely on the law of gravity. Can you imagine Harvard vs. Yale football without the law of gravity? Can you imagine a basketball game without the law of gravity? I am not talking about Michael Jordan, but for the (?). We accept it and we create games around it. And yet we don't do the same when it comes to our emotions. Now here is the key point: Painful emotions are as much as part of human nature as the law of gravity is part of physical nature. And "nature to be commanded must be obeyed". And the aeronautics engineer who wants to build an airplane has to obey, take into consideration, learn it, study and understand the law of gravity. The same applies to a psychologist. The constrained view of human nature. "Nature to be commanded must be obeyed." And yet we don't do that. We don't do in our culture. And we pay a high price for it. We

have what I called, "the great deception". We are people who ask, "So how are you doing?" And we say, "Fine. Just great." Well in fact, we are not doing so well. More appropriate would be "I'm going through a rough patch now. I'm going through a hard time. I'm really stressed." But yet, we don't want to admit that. We don't give ourselves the permission to be human, because we think there is something wrong with us if we experience these emotions. And then when everyone says, "Oh fine. Oh great. Oh terrific", then we are asked "How are you doing?" I am not going to be the only party poop here. I am not going to be the only depressed one around here. So I said, "Oh fine. Oh great." And then we contribute to this great deception and it is this great deception that leads to the great depression-- the great depression in the ultimate currency of happiness. This, to great extent, explains why so many people today experience depression the 45% figure, nationwide on college campuses.

Not enough permission to be human. I am not talking about wearing our heart on our sleeves. When someone comes to us in the elevator in William James (William James Hall), I says, "How are you doing?" "Thank you for asking. You know it all started when I was three." This is not what I am talking about. In William James, maybe the case-- because the elevator-- it does take two hours to get there for the door to close. But other than that. I'm not talking about. what I'm talking about is a space, a safe space in our lives with our closest friends, with our family, first and foremost, with ourselves, will we have the permission to be human. And what I'm not talking about is resignation. Far from it. It's not about saying, "Well I'm depressed. There's nothing I can do about it. I accept my nature. I accept my state. And that's it." I'm not talking about resignation. what I'm talking about is active acceptance. What does that mean? It means understanding that certain things I cannot change and certain things I can and ought to change. One of the main ideas we'll talk about is the distinction: we'll talk about specifically on the lecture on change between affect, behaviors and cognitions. The A, B, C of psychology. Affect-- emotion. Behavior-- action.

Cognition-- thoughts. Unconditional acceptance, permission to be human relates primarily to our affect, to our emotions. They are there, just like the law of gravity is there. That does not mean we need to accept our behavior and our cognition.

For example, I can-- and having the past experience-- envy towards my best friend, that in and of itself does not make me a bad person. It's human. I've never met a person who has never experienced or does not experience-- well, maybe the Dalai Lama-- but other than that, who does not experience envy toward other people. And if it is true about the Dalai Lama, that is because he's worked on it for decades. Envy is part of human nature-- nothing good or bad about the envy.

Nothing good or bad about experiencing the anger. Nothing good or bad about experiencing the depression or anxiety. It's part of human nature. However, the question is, how do I choose to behave, to act as a result of it? That is where the moral domain enters. That's where I can have moral or immoral behavior toward my best friend or baby, or other people in general. I can still experience envy toward my best friend and choose to behave generously and benevolently toward him. The same with cognition and we will talk a lot about it when we talk about CBT-- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I can feel it certain way. But it doesn't mean that I need to resign to my thoughts about that feeling. Rumination is one of the things that we'll talk about a lot actually not that helpful-- to ruminate about painful emotions. It's much helpful to write about them. To talk to other people about them, rather than just be thinking constantly about how miserable I am because my girlfriend just left. I haven't found anyone in Pinocchio's. So rumination doesn't help. So I don't necessarily accept all my irrational thoughts and again, we'll talk about it much more next week of how we can cognitively reframe what we were thinking. But the emotion-- that affect is the emotion, it is what it is. And the key is to be true to reality, which is also one of the main themes in the course. In many ways, this course should not be called "Positive

Psychology". But I am telling you this after you already signed up for the class so it is too late to leave. This is actually not a course on positive psychology. It's a course in reality psychology.

Because positive psychology may mean that we are only focusing on the positive and what works, ignoring all the rest that are not. Overdoing this class is shifting the pendulum. So there is more even playing field instead of the 21:1 ratio, we are doing much more, focusing on the positive. And at the same time, accepting the painful emotions are as much part of human nature as the wonderful emotions. And sooner we accept it, the better. That won't mean at the end of the course of 1504 or 100 or 100 other courses in the workshop and sold the books that you read, it's not that you will not have painful emotions anymore. It's simply your psychological immune system will become stronger, hopefully already by the end of this semester. Psychological immune system will become stronger. And that means not that we don't get ill. It means we get ill less often and when we do get sick, we'll recover more promptly. The difference between the extremely happy people and extremely unhappy people is not that one gets sad, of upset, or anxious, or depressed; and the other does not. Both groups do. It's how quickly, how promptly we can recover from these painful emotions-- in other words, how strong our psychological immune system is. And our psychological immune system strengthens when we give ourselves the permission to be human. Many of you've probably read this, come across this, but I think this captures so well the foundation of what it means to be actively accepting. This has become the official mantra in many ways of the AA movement: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can change; and wisdom to know the difference." The wisdom to know the difference-- fortunately, a lot of this wisdom can come from studies, from research, from deep introspection that you will do throughout the semester.

What I want to do now is an exercise. I want to do a group meditation. Trying to understand, not just on the cognitive level of the research, but also to experience on the visceral emotional level, what it really means to give ourselves the permission to be human. Those of you who don't feel comfortable doing it, you don't have to do it. Those who feel comfortable to do it, do it. If it's a stretch for you, I still recommend that you do it. If you never meditate before, this is a wonderful opportunity to do it for the first time. One thing I do ask you: If you are not doing it, if you don't participate, simply just keep quiet. Other than that, I really do recommend that you join us. What I want to do together now is enter the realm of unconditional acceptance. So, just sit up straight as much as possible.

If possible, your back relaxing against the back rest. Plant your feet comfortably on the floor. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Shift the focus of your breath. Shift the focus of your thoughts to your breathing. Take a deep breath in all the way down to your belly. And then breathe out. Again, deep breath in; slow, gentle, quiet breath out. Repeat that in silence. If your mind wanders, simply bring it back to your breathing. Deep, slow inhalation. Deep, slow, gentle, quiet exhalation. Most of us don't breathe deeply enough. We don't take the time to celebrate our breath, our spirit, our being. The connection, the link, the bridge between our mind and our body; between our emotions and our thoughts; between the brain and the heart. Continue with the deep breathing. As you continue with the deep breath, shift your focus to your emotions, to your feelings. How are you doing? How are you feeling? Take attention to your emotions. Whatever they are, whatever it is that your feeling, allow it to float through you.

Naturally. Just experience your emotion whatever it is. You may feel one emotion at one moment, different emotion the next. That's Ok. Whatever it is, accept it. Experience it. Give yourself the permission to be human. It's all OK. Just breath.

Continue to observe and experience whatever emotion comes up, whether it's calm or happiness, whether it's anxiety, confusion, boredom or joy. Whatever it is, continue to breathe deeply into your belly. And gently, slowly, quietly exhale. Let the emotion flow just like the breath. As you continue breathing deeply, in your mind's eye, see yourself walking out of this classroom today, walking in the yard, with the feeling that all your feelings are real fine part of human nature. They just are. Neither good nor bad. As you walk amid the buildings and trees, as you see your friends and classmates, allow these emotions to float through you, freely, lightly. By experiencing these emotions, whether the ups and the downs, what you are doing is being, being a human being. Continue to allow the breath and the emotions to just flow. To just be. What if you truly gave yourself the permission to be human? What if you are giving yourself the permission to be human? Just imagine. Life becomes so much lighter. So much simpler. When, rather than trying to fight or defeat our nature, we accept it. We accept who we are. We accept whatever emotion comes up. Deep, slow inhalation. Slow, gentle, quiet, calm exhalation. Take a few deep breaths in silence. Embrace the silence, the stillness. Embrace yourself, your emotions. And on your next exhalation-- deep, slow, quiet exhalation, open your eyes. If the person next to you is asleep, gently wake him or her up. Just imagine Just imagine the kind of life that you can experience -- hush-- the kind of life you can lead, if you truly, genuinely, really gave yourself the permission to be human. It's one of the pillars of healthy life, psychologically, physiologically. So try it. Everyday remind yourself just once or twice to give yourself the permission to be human. And give others that same permission. You deserve it.