

Positive Psychology – Lecture 1



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Hi Good morning. It's wonderful to be back here. Wonderful to see you here. I'm teaching this class because I wish a class like this had been taught when I was sitting in your seat as an undergrad here. This does not mean it is a class you wish to be taught, nor does it mean that it is the right class for you. But I hope to doing the next couple of lectures is giving you an idea what this class is about so that you can decide whether or not it is for you. I came here in 1992 And then I had a mini epiphany half way through my sophomore year. I realized that I was in a wonderful place with wonderful students around me, wonderful teachers. I was doing well academically. I was doing well in athletics. I was playing squash at that time. I was doing well socially. Everything was going well.

Except for the fact. That I was unhappy. And I didn't understand why. It was then in a matter of moments, that I decided that I had to find out why and become happier.

And that was when I switched my concentration from computer science to philosophy and psychology with a single question: how can I become happier? Over time I did become happier. What contributed most to my happiness was when I encountered a new emerging field But essentially research that falls under or within the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology, studying it, applying the ideas to my life has made me significantly happier. It continues to make me happier. And it was when I realized the impact that it had on me that I decided to share it with others. That's when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher and teach in this field. So this is positive psychology, psychology 1504. And we'll be exploring this new, relatively new and fascinating field. And hopefully, we will be exploring more than the field ourselves.

When I first taught this class that was back in 2002, I taught it at a seminar and had eight students. Two dropped out. That left me with six. The year after, the class became slightly larger. I had over three hundred students. And then third year when I taught it which was the last time, I had 850 students in the class, making it at that point the largest course at Harvard. And that's when the media became interested. Because they wanted to understand why. They wanted to understand this phenomenon that "here you have a class, that's larger than Introduction to Economics". How could that be? So I was invited by the media for interviews, whether it was newspapers, radio, television. And I started to notice a pattern during those interviews. So I would walk into the interview. We would have the interview. And afterwards, the producer or the interviewer would walk me out and say something to the effects of "well thank you Tal for the interview. But you know I expected you to be different".

And I would ask, as nonchalant as I could of course. I didn't really care but had to ask anyway, "how different?" And they would say, "Well you know, we expected you to be more outgoing." Next interview, the end of the interview, same thing. "Thank you for doing the interview. But you know Tal, I expected you to be

different." And once again, nonchalant of course. "Well you know, we expected you to be less, less introverted." Next interview, same thing. "How different?" "Well, you know, more extroverted. More outgoing." Next interview. "Well, you know, less shy." Coz I get very nervous in interviews.

Interview after interview, literally dozens. More outgoing, more cheerful. Less introverted, more extroverted. And on and on. But here is the best one. So this is one of the local channels here around Boston. I was going to the interview. We had a quite long interview, which I thought was actually pretty good. And at the end of the interview, the interviewer is a very jolly guy. He walks me out and puts his hands on my shoulder, and says, "thank you very much for doing the interview." And then the usual comes. "But you know Tal, I expected you to be different." And I said, "How different?" Just so you understand, by this time, my self-esteem is short. But still with some resemblance of nonchalance I asked, "how different?" And he looks at me and says, "Well I don't know Tal. I expected you to be taller." Taller? What? Five seven, well ok five six and a half is not enough to teach happiness? And I thought about it. I thought about it a lot. The whole pattern from the beginning.

And I think I understand why they expected someone different. You see they had to explain to themselves as well as the audience, "how come this lecture is larger than the Introduction to Economics?" And the way to explain it must be that the teacher is very outgoing, extremely charismatic, very cheerful and extrovert and of course, tall. Well, there is one L missing there. But... Yeah. If only. So the problem though is that they were looking in the wrong place for the explanation. In other words, they were looking at the messenger. What they needed to look at was the message. Now how do I know that? You see because I see other positive psychology classes on other campuses around the country and around the world.

There are over 200 hundred campuses here in United States that teach positive

psychology. On almost every campus where this class is taught, it's either one of the or the largest class. It's about the message. I see more and more organizations taking up positive psychology in their, as consultant companies, some of them the leading big consultant companies are taking it on. More and more high schools are introducing positive psychology class. ***** Elementary schools are introducing it. The governments around the world are expressing interest in this new emerging field. Why? Because it works. Because it really works. You see this whole realm on life flourishing, on happiness, on well-being has been until recently dominated by the self-health movement. What do we have in the self-health movement? We have books that are very interesting, that are very accessible. We have speakers who are very outgoing, very charismatic and tall, attracting the masses into these workshops, seminars and lectures. But, there is a very big "but" here. Many of these books, many of these workshops and seminars lack substance. Very often, overpromising and under-delivering.

So these are five things you need to know to be happy. The three things to be the great leader. The one secret of success, happiness and a perfect love life. Overpromising. Under-delivering. On the other hand, we have academia. What do we have in academia? We have a lot of rigor, a lot of substance. We have datas analyzed, reanalyzed and meta-analyzed. Things that actually work, good stuff. But, and there is also a very big "but" here. Very few people read refereed academic journals. I mean Think about it: how many people outside this room of course have read the last twelve issues of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology? Most people don't even know what that means. The head of my PHD programs actually estimated the average academic journal article is read by seven people. You know... And that includes the author's mother. So you know I say half in jest but it's actually really sad. Because...certainly sad for me, as an academic. Because these things are good. They are important. These things make a difference, can even make more of a difference.

But not accessible to most people. And this is where positive psychology comes in. And this is also where this class comes in. The explicit mandate of positive psychology as well as of this class is to create a bridge between Ivory tower and mainstreet. In other words, it is to bring the rigor, the substance, the empirical foundation, the science from academia and merge it with accessibility of the self-help or New Age movement.

In a way the best of both worlds. And this explains the popularity of the field of positive psychology: science that works. This class will be taught on two levels. The first level it will be taught as any other class in psychology or any of the classes you've taken here. You'll be introduced here to studies, to research, to rigorous academic work. You'll be writing paper, academic paper. You'll be taking exams. Just like every other class. But then it will also be taught at the second level, which is for every paper that you'll read, every paper that you'll write, you'll always be thinking, "Ok, how can I take these ideas and apply them to my life? How can I apply them to my relationship? How can I apply them to my community?" Two levels. The academic. Applied. I did not just introduce whether it's in the readings or in the lectures ideas just because they are interesting for the sake of the idea. It is always an idea that is both rigorous and can be applied. Just a few words about housekeeping.

Some of the questions that I have already received from you before the class started. So this, unfortunately, is the last time that I am teaching positive psychology or any other class for that matter at Harvard. Hopefully within two years, probably not next year, but within two years, there will be positive psychology class offered, but I certainly cannot guarantee it. About feedback and questions. If you have any questions, anything that's not clear, if you agree or disagree with something, email me or email your TF (Teaching Fellow at Harvard, just like TA at other schools) and we'll always respond. Sometimes if the question is asked by enough people, we'll respond

to it publicly. Always anonymously. Unless you specified specifically that your name can be mentioned. Sometimes you may be listening to a lecture and then half way through it there is an emergency. There is something that you really have to ask, something that cannot wait. In that case, please just put your hand up. Coz it's just like when you have to go to the bathroom. Just can't stop. Can't wait. And when you gotta go, you gotta go. So we'll take a positive psychology break for that. And just stop me half way through and I'll answer any question. All the power points, as well as the videos of the classes will be online. Will be available within couple of days. Well the power points will be available before, say for this lecture it will be before so that you can use them in class. The videos, unfortunately, cannot be made available before. We tried. Couldn't figure it out. So it will be available within a day or two after.

And the reason why they are up there. First of all, I do prefer that you attend lecture. I do prefer that you are physically here. You get things in the energy of the room with so many students so you wouldn't just get from your computer. The reason why I do put them up is so that you have the opportunity if you want to see it again or if you have to miss a class. That's perfectly fine. And also because, and this is also the reason why the power points are always available, I want you to be engaged in the material. I want you to be engaged in whatever it is that we are discussing in class. Not necessarily thinking about getting down every word that I say on paper, remembering everything, memorizing everything. I want you to take rather than passive notes of writing down what is on the power point or every word that I say. I'd like you to take active notes. And that means being engaged with the material. For example, if you heard something and idea and you say, "Oh, that's interesting." Star it. Write it down. Or "Ok I think I'll start applying this." Write it down. "Or I want to tell my mom about this later." Or "I want to talk to my roommates or my team about this idea." Write it down. Active note-taking is opposed to passive note-taking for two reasons.

First of all, as I said, this class is a class about making a difference in people's lives. I would not be teaching the class just for its academic beauty, although there is a lot of academic beauty in this field. So write down if you have an idea that you think you can apply. The second reason why we should that is because you'll remember more. Better attention, better understanding of the material if you are actively engaged, as opposed to just taking down passive notes. Throughout the class, starting next week, we'll take what I called, "time-ins" as opposed to "time-outs". it's like a time-out. It's the time where we stop the class and you look inward. And this is literally a time of silence in a class.

I will stop for a minute or two. And you'll have a chance either to just stare at me or anyone else, or think about what we've just discussed, or have a guiding question that I will provide you that you'll address during the class. The reason why I have "Time-ins"... This is something that I am introducing this year for the first time. We didn't have it last time. It's because over the last two years since I last taught it, I've done a lot work in the area of silence. I've read a lot of research in this area about the importance of quiet times whether it's in a class, in a lecture, whether it is at home, whether it is for a leader in the business, for relationship, for children starting from pre-schools. Now many of you, as you are going through these "time-ins" if you decide to take this class may think, "Well, is this what I'm paying 40,000 dollars a year for? To sit a class and be quiet?" First of all, it will only be a minute or two at a time, maybe once or twice a lecture. But second, it is maybe the most important thing you'll take from this class. The notion of embracing stillness. Let me read to you an excerpt from a study that was run by two MIT professors. By the way, all the names that I read and that are not on the power points, you don't need to remember or write down. This is just for your edification.

So David Foster and Matthew Wilson. Both of them are from MIT. Indeed the

following study that I think confirms the importance of "time-in", time to look inside. What they did is they scanned the brains of rats while they were in a maze and after they went through the maze. And here's what they found. "What the results suggest is that while there certainly is some record of your experience as it is occurring, in other words when they were doing the maze, when you try to figure out: 'What was important? What should I keep and throw away?' during periods of quiet wakeful introspection. What they show was rats who went through the maze and went through the maze again and again, learned far less than rats who took time aside, chilled out a little bit after a maze, had more margarita. Experience, embrace stillness. This has implications and they showed implications to human beings as well. Not only those of the rat race, all human beings. So what they say is that "replay might constitute a general mechanism of learning and memory". Both learning, understanding, as well as memory, retention. When we reflect, when we replay the material, we are much more likely to retain, to remember what we have just been through. So the importance of time aside cannot be over-emphasized.

In his wonderful book of teaching, Parker Palmer-- it's called The Courage to Teach, says the following-- Words are not the sole medium of exchange in teaching and learning. We educate with silence as well. Silence gives us a chance to reflect on what we have said and heard. In authentic education, silence is treated as a trustworthy matrix for the inner work students must do, a medium for learning of the deepest sort." Silence is something that is missing from our culture. I know that many of you have probably read Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Robert M. Pirsig. He had a second book out, less well-known, called Lila (Lila: an Inquiry into Morals). And Lila is an anthropological study of Native Americans. And one of the distinguishing characteristics between these two cultures is their approach were silence. What he found was when he went and sat around with Native Americans.

They would sit around the fire and hang out for two, three hours without saying a word. Just sit around. Look at one another. Smile. Have a good time. Introspect. Just be there for hours. While he points out that in our culture we feel very uncomfortable with the absence of words, with the absence of sound or noise. We have to fill up all the gaps. This is an important cultural difference. And we pay a price for this lack of stillness. A price that we'll talk about a lot, when I talk about relationships, when I talk about virtue and morality and when we talk about happiness and wellbeing in general. Let me give a little bit background on positive psychology: how we came about and how this class came about. In many ways, positive psychology is the brainchild, the product and the grandchild of humanistic psychology. What we have in humanistic psychology is essentially a reaction to the existing psychologies of the time. The founders, considered the founders of humanistic psychology in fact called it "the third force". Why the "third force"?

Because the first force was behaviorism. The work of Skinner (B. F. Skinner), the work of Watson (John B. Watson), the work of Thorndik (Edward Thorndik). This was the first force. The second force was psychoanalysis. The work of Freud (Sigmund Freud), Jung (Carl Jung), Adler (Alfred Adler) to some extent. This was the second force. And the third force, humanistic psychology came as a reaction to it. First it is a reaction to behaviorism. Behaviorism looks at the human entity, at the person as basically a collection of behaviors as a box, like a billiard ball knocked around by reinforcements, by punishment, by reward. And what humanistic psychology said was that we are much more than a billiard ball being knocked around. We have spirit. We have a soul. We have cognitions and thoughts that matter. It's not just behavior that is important for understanding as well as improving life. And then psychoanalysis, the second force. The psychoanalysis is about basically understanding mostly through the subconscious: that's how you understand it; that's how you improve the quality of life. There are defense mechanisms, there are biological

instincts, neurosis-- and if you understand these very often dark forces, were better able to deal with life: understand as well as improve the quality of life.

Humanistic psychology says human beings are much more than that. Much more than biological instincts, much more than neurosis, much more than the person who exists in a Newtonian reality like a billiard ball. We need to value much more the human being. We need to give much more dignity and freedom to the person. There was a problem. The problem was humanistic psychology is said lacked the rigorous methodology. While it brought in many wonderful ideas, talked about the study of well-being, talked about the study of optimism, of kindness, of morality, of virtue, of love, of relationships, of peak experiences, of self-actualization, of empathy. All these wonderful concepts that we'll talk about throughout the semester. It wasn't as rigorous about its epistemology, about how we form ideas and how we learn. And that's why, in many ways, largely, not completely but largely more of into the self-health movement. Interesting ideas, good ideas, important ideas, certainly good intentions, but to some extent, without the academic rigor. And that's why it lacked the impact on academia. That's why we don't have partly any humanistic psychology classes offered in universities today. There are very few still around. And this is why also a lot of it became the New Age essentially. But still, it's humanistic psychology that has in many ways fathered and mothered, as we'll see, positive psychology. So let's meet the grandparents.

People like Rollo May. People like Carl Rogers. And more than anyone, Abraham Maslow. Was the American Psychological Association President. Was the professor just down the road here at Brandeis (Brandeis University). And he introduced this humanistic psychology in 1954. He wrote a chapter, called "Toward the Positive Psychology". 1954. In it he said we need to also research kindness, goodness and happiness and optimism. In many ways it was way ahead of his time.

Then if Maslow is the grandfather, then Karen Horney is the grandmother. Initially a psychoanalyst, trained through the works of Freud, she realized the focuses had been too much on the negative-- on neurosis, on psychosis and said we also, not only but also have to focus on what is working on human organism. We have to work and look at the fine qualities and cultivate those. Because part of being human is being those things as well. In many ways, brought about the movement toward humanistic psychology and through that-- positive psychology. Aaron Antonovsky, the third person I would consider the grandfather, brought in the idea of focusing on health. He has a new concept. Or he introduced a new concept. I'm still here. Don't worry. He introduced a new concept, which he called-- his own neologism, "salutogenesis". Salutogenesis: saluto--(which is) health; geneis (which is) origin. The origin of health. And this was an alternative model, to the conventional ways model of pathologies. So instead of just studying pathologies whether it's in physical health or psychological health, we should also study the origin of health. In many ways that is what prevented medicine is about. So this was a novel idea back in 1970s when he introduced it. And we'll talk a lot about Aaron Antonovsky. Now the parents.

Martin Seligman, considered the father of the positive psychology, network of scholars, started the field in 1998. Like Maslow, he too, was the President of American Psychological Association. And as his mandate, during his presidency, he had two aims: the first aim-- to make academic psychology more accessible, -- in other words-- bridge Ivory tower and mainstreet. This was the first aim of his presidency. The second aim was introduce a positive psychology. A psychology that will look at also things that work, that were not just study-- depression, anxiety, schizophrenia and neurosis. A psychology a network of scholars who will focus on -- love, relationships, self-esteem, motivation, resilience and well-being. And he introduced these ideas and it's all been literally uphill from then. Before Martin Seligman, this all happened in 1998 and we'll talk about it a little bit more next time.

This all happened in 1998. Long before 1998, our very own professor Ellen Langer did research in all these areas, bringing the humanistic spirit and combining it with the academic scientific rigor. We'll be talking probably more than any other scholar about her work in this class. And another person from Harvard, one of the parents of positive psychology was Philip Stone, who passed away two years ago, yesterday. Both Langer and Stone were my physicist advisors, introduced me to the field of positive psychology into this research. In 1998 when I had the first positive psychology summit, Professor Stone took me along with him. I was a graduate student.

In 1999 he taught the first positive psychology class at Harvard, one of the first in the world. I was his teaching fellow. A couple of years later, he taught it again. Again I was his teaching fellow. And then when I graduated, he suggested I take over his class. And here we are today. So this is 1504. Let me give you a sense of, in the next half an hour and so, a sense of what you expect in this class. The first thing is this class is not just about information, it is also explicitly about transformation. What do I mean by that? You see most of education today is about information. What is information? So we have a container, which is our mind. And information is about taking data, taking science, taking information and putting it inside the form. That is information. Now when this form is filled, that's when we are educated. More information, more data, better. Not enough. Because it's not just information that determines our wellbeing, our success, our self-esteem, our motivational level, the relationship and the quality of our relationships. It's much more than information. Transformation is about taking this form and changing it. Trans, (which is) change, form, (which is) shape. Change the form. This is transformation. This is the distinction that I learned first from at the school.

Professor Robert Kegan who taught about this. Information in and of itself is not

enough. Think about this example. You go for an athletic meet. Your aim is to get into the top three-- to be a medalist. You come in number eight. What's the analysis? What's the interpretation? -- Terrible. I just failed. You feel deflated. Enervated. On the other hand, the exact same event. You came eight when you expected to be top three. You can interpret it as "Ok, so what have I learned? I need to work even harder." You become more energized. You learned from the experience. In other words, the same objective information which is "I got eighth; I expected top three". The same information, very different interpretation. One is a disaster, the other interpretation is an opportunity. One leads to loss of energy, the other one to increasing energy. Or think about another very common example. We know of many people around the world who seemingly have everything, who are doing well, who have more than they need. And yet they are unhappy.

And then there are people around the world who have very little. And yet they never cease, never stop to celebrate life. And we have another way around as well. People who have everything and appreciate it and enjoy life. People who have very little and who see themselves as victim. In other words, it's not just the information that goes in. It's also the shape, the interpretation, the perception, the focus. And that is determined by the shape of the form. This is what I realized when I was an undergrad here. Seemingly, looking in from the outside, I had everything. Doing well (in) sports, academics and socially. And yet my perception, my focus, my interpretation of life-- not that great. I wasn't happy. The interpretation matters very often a lot more as we'll see than the information that goes in. One of the sentences that I'll repeat throughout the class is that happiness is much more contingent on our state of mind than our status or the state of our bank account. And that's where transformation comes in. And that's why it's so important for wellbeing. What that will look like in practice is that we'll cover not so much information. We'll uncover much more and I don't mean that in the Berkeley (George Berkeley) sense of the word.

I mean that in the academic sense of the word. In other words, what we'll do is uncover potential that we have inside, that we have inside of us all along. Maybe we just didn't see. Or maybe it's obscured by something or another. We'll uncover it so that we can utilize it, so that we can focus on it, so that we can perceive it. Here is a story just to illustrate it. So this is Michelangelo.

One day he was asked by a journalist of his time, "how did you create this most amazing masterpiece, David?", to which Michelangelo responded, "it was easy. I went to the quarry. I saw this huge piece of marble. And in it I saw David. All I needed to do was to chip away the excess stone, to get rid of the marble that shouldn't have been there. And when I got rid of this excess stone, there was David. " Not obviously easier said than done. But the story captured the metaphor of what this class very much is about. It's about chipping away the excess stone. It's about getting rid of limitations, of barriers, whether it's the fear of failure, something that we didn't have as kids. But today most people in our culture have it. It's about chipping away perfectionism that is debilitating and often hurts us. It's about chipping away our ability for success, because maybe we are afraid of success. Maybe we feel guilty about some of the things that we have in our life, and that in turn limits us. Maybe it's about chipping away the limitations on our relationships in while we don't thrive within them.

This is what this class is mostly about. As Dero (?) says, "soul grows more by subtraction than by addition", by getting rid of these limitations, limitations that are preventing us from fulfilling our potential. Because our potential is in there in nature. We talk a lot about human nature. It's there whether it's through God, whether it's through evolution. We have a lot of potential that over time with we fix (?) stone of voices with being part of our culture that very often these limitations are put on top of us just like the excess stone. Lao Tzu, "In pursuit of knowledge every day something is acquired. In pursuit of wisdom, every day something is dropped." Knowledge is

about information. Wisdom is about transformation. I was recently interviewed for a newsletter on coaching before a large conference on the topic. And the interviewer asked me, "So what tips, what tools can you give from positive psychology?"

So I talked about some of "the greatest hits": the importance of gratitude, the importance of physical exercise. I talked about the importance of spending time on our relationships, about taking time aside and simplifying and so on and so on. As I was going through my long list, she stopped me and she said, "You know Tal, this is all good. The importance of stuff, I know. But our readers already know that. I am looking for the Wow factor. Come on, surprise me. What can you tell our readers?" And I thought about this question for a minute and I realized that there is no Wow. And I told her that, "you know if there is a wow, the wow is that there is no wow." That's it. Because the over-not-transformation emperor, the emperor of quick fixes has no clothes.

It doesn't exist. it's over-promising and under-delivering. A life, a fulfilling life, a rich life includes ups and downs, includes pain and getting up again, includes failure and getting up again. It includes success and celebrating it. Victories and losses, ups and downs, as we'll talk about next week. It's not about this one secret. One Wow to the good life. And many of the things you will learn in this class, you've heard of before. Probably nothing new to you. You already know it inside of you. And you are going to say, "Well, it is common sense." And yes, a lot of it is common sense. However, it is Voltaire once said, "Common sense is not that common." And this especially applies to application. So the aim of this class is to make common sense more common, especially in the real world application. At the end of the class, here's what I am hoping for, at the end of the class, if you decide to take it.

At the end of the semester, I don't think—I am not expecting you to come and tell me, "Wow! Thank you for teaching me so many new things." That's not what I am

expecting. I don't think that is what will happen. What I hope will happen is for you to come and say, rather than "thank you for teaching me", something you would say "thank you for reminding me of something that I've already known". And this is what this class is about. It's constant reminder, twice a week. Constant reminder of what you already know, of what is inside you. The David that is inside you. And what this class will hopefully do is to help you chip away some of these limitations, whether it's limitation, cognitive limitations that prevent you from seeing what you already knew, emotional limitations that are preventing you from deriving the benefits of what you already know, or behavioral limitations. The ABC: affect, behavior, and cognition that we'll talk about during the change week. So I'm making common sense more common. Information in and of itself is simply not enough. It's not enough and what we need in addition to our information highway is a transformation highway. Transformation high way, or transformation back roads, to come through the fast increasing pace. Because as we'll talk about next time, rates of depression are on the rise, rates of anxiety are on the rise, not just in this country, globally. It's literally global epidemic. And to deal with it, more information will just not do. Just not enough.

Here is Archibald MacLeish. He was a poet, was a Harvard professor, "What is wrong is not the great discoveries of science-- information is always better than ignorance, no matter what information or what ignorance. What is wrong is the belief behind the information, the belief that information will change the world. It won't." Just adding it and filling up our containers with more and more stuff. More and more information, more and more data. It's just not enough. We need more than that. This class will take a humanistic approach. Let me read you a quick excerpt by Abraham Maslow who talks about this approach, "If one took a course or picked up a book on the psychology of learning, most of it, in my opinion, would be beside the point - that is, beside the 'humanistic' point. Most of it would present learning as the acquisition of associations, of skills and capacities that are external and not intrinsic to the human

character, to the human personality, to the person himself." External refers to information. Internal refers to the transformation, the changing of the form. And when we talk about transformation, actually mean it quite literally-- changing of the form, changing of the brain as we'll talk about. We'll talk about meditation for instance.

We know our brain today can actually change through MRI studies since 1998. A new concept came up which is Neurogenesis or Neuroplasticity, meaning our brain actually changes and transforms. It changes its form throughout our life. So I don't just mean it metaphorically, I also very often mean it literally. Abraham Maslow continues, "Humanistic philosophy offers a new conception of learning, of teaching, and of education. Stated simply, such a concept holds that the function of education, the goal of education—the human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned—is ultimately the "self-actualization" of a person, the becoming fully human, the development of the fullest height that the human species can stand up to or that the particular individual can come to.

In a less technical way, it is helping the person to become the best that he is able to become." And this was before the Ad came up for the army. That "Be all you can be." This is what the class is about. It's the humanistic approach. It's about fulfilling our potential, chipping away those limitations. Now to many of you this may sound naive, idealistic. Naive it is not. Idealistic, it is. And we'll talk about and discuss the importance of idealism and maintaining idealism if we are to introduce personal change, inter-personal change, or community or society change. This class is not about providing answers, concerning the good life and happiness. It is about identifying the right questions. "Ask and ye shall you receive", say the Scripture. This class is what I think education is all about, which is that the quest for information and transformation must begin with the question. Quest, question, there is no coincidence that there is an etymological link between the two. In this class we'll be asking, you'll

be asked many questions, questions that as you'll see, create reality. We'll talk about it already next time. The importance of the questions you ask of yourselves first and foremost, of your partner, of your students, of your parents, of your employees in the future, teammates and so on. Questions make a difference.

Peter Drucker, "The most common source of mistakes in management decisions Peter Drucker, considered the most important management scholar of 20th century, just recently passed away, saying the biggest mistake is not asking the right questions. As we'll see next time, this is the biggest mistake in research potentially. This is the biggest mistake in application. Not asking the right questions as well, whether it's in managing organizations, whether it's managing our lives. Now. When I said that questions are important and answers matter less, I am not coming from a point of relativism. I'm not a relativist. I think they are ... To some questions definitive answers that are important to know. However, what I'm saying is that it's important, not less important to focus on questions when it comes to education.

The educator, Neil Postman once said, "The kids enter schools as question marks and they leave as periods." My hope in this class is to bring up many more question marks than periods. Once again, it's about chipping away the excess stone because as kids, we are always asking questions. We are always curious. Let me show you a quick excerpt from a video of one of my favorite psychologists, actually the comedian, Seinfeld. We will watch a lot of excerpts throughout the semester. Talking about what we were like as kids. See is this in your way "So, the first couple of years I made my own costumes which of course sucked: the ghost, the hobo... Then, finally, the third year, begging the parents, I got the Superman Halloween costume. Not surprisingly. Cardboard box, self-made top, mask included. Remember the rubber band on the back of that mask? That was a quality item there, wasn't it?

That was good for about 10 seconds before it snapped out of that cheap little

staple they put it in there with. You go to your first house: "Trick or..." Snap!" It broke. I don't believe it!" "Wait up you guys! I gotta fix it! Hey wait up! Wait up!" Kids don't say "wait". They say "wait up! Hey wait up!" Coz when you are little your life is up. Your future is up. Everything you want is up. "Wait up! Hold up! Shut up! Momma, clean up! Let me stay up!" Parents of course are just the opposite. Everything is down. "Just calm down! Slow down! Calm down here! Sit down. Put that down!" So again this curiosity, this looking up, this opening up is opposed to closing down that kids have. This notion. This is what I hope will happen in this class. The one real objective of education is to leave a man in the condition of continually asking questions.

So here is a longitudinal study that was done by John Carter. John Carter, professor of leadership management of the business school across the river, came to Harvard in 1972, joined the faculty and started to follow Harvard class, MBA class of 1973 and followed them through 20 years. And what he was interested in was to find all the information he could about this class. What he found 20 years later, early 90s when this study ended was these students were extremely successful, Or ex-students were extremely successful, students were extremely successful, very wealthy, having a lot of impact, whether it's on the organizations, on the community. They did extremely well. But within the large group of highly successful Harvard MBAs, he found a small group that was extraordinarily successful, more successful than the rest of group, whether in terms of income, whether in terms of impact, whether in terms of overall quality of life. Extraordinarily successful. What he wanted to identify was why-- what distinguishes this small group from the rest of the pack: very successful, but not quite as successful as that small group. And he found only two things. It was not their IQs that made no difference whatsoever to their long-term success.

It was not where they came from, pre-MBA, what they did had nothing to do with it. Two and two things along mattered in terms of determining who will be the

extraordinarily successful and the rest: the first thing was the extraordinarily successful groups really believe in themselves. They thought they could do well. They were driven. They were motivated. And we'll talk about it in future lecture as belief in self-fulfilling prophecies. They thought "I'm going to make it. I'm going to succeed." That's the first thing. The sense of the confidence. The second thing that he found was this group, they were always asking questions, --always asking questions, initially of their boss, later of their employees, of their partners, children, parents, friends. They were always asking question. They were always at the state of curiosity. Always looking up, opening up, wanting to understand the world the more. They didn't say "Now I have my MBA. That's it. I know enough. " They were life-long learners. They were always asking questions. These two distinguishing characteristics account for the difference between the extraordinarily successful and those who were successful.

The question that has guided me whether it's in writing the book, whether it's in creating this class, whether it's first and foremost my personal life is what I call "the question of the question", which is "how can we help ourselves and others, individuals, communities and society become happier?" Note that it is not about helping ourselves and others become happy. It is about becoming happier. Why? Because many people ask me, "So Tal, are you happy?" And I can't really answer that question. I don't know what it means. How do I determine whether or not I am happy? Is it compared to someone else? Is there a certain point beyond which I become happy? Happiness is not a binary either-or, zero-one-- either I'm happy or I'm unhappy. Happiness resides on a continuum. So my answer to this question-- "am I happy?" is today I'm happier than I was 15 years ago when I started focusing on this pursuit.

15 years from now I certainly hope to be happier than I am today. Happiness is lifelong pursuit. Hopefully this class is part of that pursuit, but just part. You'll not be happy at the end of class. Hopefully you'll be happier. Cos many people sit here

during the lectures on self-esteem, for example, or when we talk explicitly about happiness, they say, "Wait. Do I have self-esteem?"-- Thinking to themselves. "Do I have high self-esteem or low self-esteem?" Irrelevant. Impossible to answer also. The question is "how can I improve my self-esteem, my healthy self-esteem, not narcissism of course? How can I become happier?" That's an important question. And this is the question of questions. This class is not a survey of positive psychology.

If you want a survey on positive psychology, I can recommend some excellent textbooks whether it's by Lopez (Shane J. Lopez) or by Peterson (Chris Peterson). Great textbooks. There is also The Handbook of Positive Psychology which is a huge book with most what you want to know about this field. You can also use it in self-defense. Very useful in that respect. But a wonderful book, very well-written, very accessible in the spirit of positive psychology. But this is not that. This is not a survey of positive psychology. What it is is a selective exploration of the question of the questions. In that way, it is eclectic. My background is in psychology and philosophy. I studied organizational behavior. I worked as a consultant in business for a few years. Still do some work there. I worked in the field of education, doing a lot of work in field of education. And I take from all these areas.

I also draw on not just from positive psychology. I draw on clinical psychology in this class. I draw on cognitive psychology, social psychology and so on. It's an eclectic class. Because my question, my guiding question was "what would contribute to happiness?" And if something within psychopathology I thought could contribute to our wellbeing, I took that and used that. And if something from the field of consulting in organizational behavior could contribute, that became part of the class, as much as I could fit in of course in one semester. So the class is eclectic. The class is not cross-cultural. I will bring in ideas from eastern thoughts. I lived in Asia for a few years. I worked there. Studied and continue to study the eastern philosophies and

psychologies. But my train primarily is in western psychology. And the focus of the class will be that. However that doesn't mean that positive psychology doesn't apply to people from different places in the world. There was recently a meeting between senior scientists, psychologists from the west, people like Paul Ekman, Richard Davidson- some of the most important minds in the field of psychology meeting with the Dalai Lama and some of his monks.

They were talking about the future of psychology, about the research, and how can you research meditation and so on. And one of the things they were talking a lot about is the cultural differences. And when that came up, the Dalai Lama suddenly seemed uneasy. And when Daniel Goleman who was writing about this whole event and it was held in India asked him what's wrong, Dalai Lama said that he was not comfortable with talking and emphasizing so much cultural differences. You can say many things about Dalai Lama. One thing you cannot say about him is that he's culturally insensitive, arguably one of the most sensitive people alive. And yet he said we are focusing too much on cultural differences and he added not because there are no cultural differences. Of course there are and they are important. But there are many more similarities than differences. And we shouldn't ignore those similarities.

Daniel Goleman about the Dalai Lama, "We were a little bit surprised by the Dalai Lama's seeming resistance to the notion of cultural differences. So I am willing to introduce these ideas but A, because it's not my training and people who are focusing on cultural differences will do a much better job than I do; and second, because what I hope to look into is the universal, things are common across cultures. So we'll study research in this area. But even more than that, we'll become even more particular than just talking about psychology in this part of the world. We'll study yourselves. We are going to go that particular. Now why? When I put this class together, I didn't think to myself, "Ok, so what are the things that I need to introduce

in order to please the participants in the class, the students?"

That's not what I thought. What I thought about was "what was the class that I would have wanted to take as an undergraduate here? What would help me become happier if I were sitting there?" In other words, thinking from my perspective from very personal perspective. In this class I am going to encourage you. about large sample sizes. But I'm going to encourage you more than anything to look inside yourselves. To study yourselves. Whether it's through response papers that will be due weekly starting in 2 weeks; whether it's in your final project that will be a presentation that you won't have to give but you'll have to write out-- a presentation about your favorite topic or the topic that matters most to you; whether it's in sections that you'll be talking about how can I apply these ideas to my life.

The time-ins are about thinking about how can I take in the ideas and use them. It's about studying ourselves. Because as Carl Rogers says, "What is most personal is most general." "What is most personal is most general." And as Maslow adds, "We must remember that knowledge of one's own deep nature is also simultaneously knowledge of human nature in general." When we understand ourselves better, when we identify ourselves, we are better able to identify with others. In fact, this is in many ways the source of empathy, of the healthy empathy. And there are some studies showing that people who know themselves, who study themselves, who are self-reflective, display less egregious behavior, less immoral behavior toward others. Behavior that would fall under say, racism. And it's counter-intuitive to some extent. "Wait. Don't you first need to study the other so that you can be more sensitive to others?" Yes, that too. But it's not enough. It is important to also study ourselves, because when we see our deep nature, what we encounter there is part of the universal nature, the similarities among us all, regardless of where we are from.

And this was what Dalai Lama was talking about: not stop cross-cultural. Do it.

Important. But at the same time, not ignore the self. Not ignore the universal within each one of us. C.S. Lewis, "There is one thing and only one in the whole universe which we know about that we could learn from external observation. That one thing is ourselves. We have, so to speak, inside information; we are in the know." Now there are of course biases when we study ourselves which is why it's not enough to just study the self. It's important to counter it, to add to it, academic work, studying others. That's why we'll do some research or study research as well as do some search--searching inside us. Both are important. We shouldn't, just because there are biases and mistakes that potentially can be made, it doesn't mean we need to throw out the baby with the bath water and stop studying ourselves. So we'll do that or rather you'll do that probably more than any other class on campus.

Finally this may be news to you, but this is not English 10A or Math 55, meaning you'll not have to read as much as you will read for 10A or for a history class, and this class is not as difficult as Math 55 so you rest. I'm sure there are some people here who took the class. This class at the same time is about rigorous fun. Fun...because it's fun to study ourselves. Sometimes it hurts and sometimes we see things that we may not like, but overall it's fun. It's interesting. And at the same time it's rigorous, based on research. Now many of the ideas that you'll encounter in this class are very simple, very accessible. Common sense. However they are simple, not simplistic. And here is the difference. Oliver Wendell Holmes NOliver Wendell Holmes-- this court is attributed to him, not 100% sure it's his-- said, "I would not give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."

What Holmes means here is that he doesn't care about just simplicity, easy, off-the-cuff, whimsical ideas. What he does care about though is the simplicity that comes after. We have chewed the idea, after we have digested it, after we have

thought about it. Ideas that have been worked on. And if on the other side of complexity we can read simplicity and common sense, that's great. That's what he's interested in. That is also positive psychology researchers that we'll discuss throughout the semester are interested in. The simplicity on the other side of complexity. And there is a very big difference between these two simplicities, even though on the face of it, they may at times look similar. What this class requires is a very different kind of effort. A very different kind of effort to other class. Again it doesn't require the effort that you'll need in 55 or in English 10A. The kind of effort that it does require is the effort of application, of applying into your life, of introducing behavioral actual change to your life. And before we go into some of the technicalities of the class such as the syllabus, I want to end with a story about Peter Drucker. Peter Drucker, who I quoted earlier, father of study of management in modern times. Peter Drucker lived to the grand old age of 94, passed away just a couple of years ago. Toward the end of his life while he was still 100% lucid, it was more difficult for him to be mobile and to go into organizations. So what he did was invite people who wanted consulting from him, wanted to learn from him to come to his home. And he had Presidents, Premier Ministers of countries.

He had CEOs of Fortune 500 companies coming spend the weekend with him. And on Friday, this was how we started with every session, with every world leader, whether in business, whether in non-for-profit, whether in politics. He would say to them the following, "on Monday I don't want you to call me up and tell me how wonderful it was, "-- meaning how wonderful the weekend was, "on Monday I want you to call me up and tell me what you are doing differently." At the end of the semester or at the end of the lecture, if you enjoyed it, by all means tell me that you enjoyed it, that you had fun. But more important, it is what you are doing differently, how this has an impact on your life and that takes effort. We are going to spend a whole week talking just about change, nothing directly related to positive psychology.

Just about change. Because it is so difficult to change. Because we know most organizational change fails, because we know more individual change fails. Unless we introduce behavioral change along with our cognitive and emotional change. Affect and cognition is not enough; behavior has to be there as well. What you are doing differently. To do things differently very often takes courage.

Some of your response papers that you'll hand in-- none of them are graded; they are all just graded "pass/failed"-- you'll have to hand them in and then you'll pass. But some of them may be the most difficult papers that you've written here. For some they'll be the easiest. And things will just flow out. That's about introducing change. That's about reflecting. That's about taking time-in. That's about chipping away the excess stone. And it can only be done through this kind of effort. So if you really want class to make a difference in your life, it's up to you. I'm going to introduce to you the material. I'm going to introduce to you this wonderful new field of positive psychology. what is up to you is to then take it and apply it. I want to talk a little about the syllabus and the requirements. And I'll give you a little time for questions. But before I do that, I would also like to welcome-- I know that some of you are watching this from home, to the extension school students, it's wonderful to have you here. Do come and visit once a while. And you'll be working with obviously part of this class, but also with Deb Levy who is the, they had teaching fellow for the extension school.

They had teaching fellow for the FAS class is Sean Achor and I'd like just to invite him for just a few words, just to introduce himself to you. And you'll be introduced to other TFs we have. We have an amazing team this year. This is Sean. Sean: Hey good morning. Can you guys hear me? Can you hear me now? Great. This is absolutely honored to be back teaching positive psychology again. Tal is too humble. This is not only extraordinary that he is sharing his time with us, but he's actually moved here back, moved his family back from Israel for the entire semester,--

his wife and his two little children just so he can teach this class with us. And this is absolutely an extraordinary opportunity for us to share this moment with them. And I'm really excited about it. Last time we taught this class, we did a survey to find out what type of people were sitting in this room-- they are just like yourselves-- and find out why you'll be taking this class. Coz the comment that we get so often about this class is why would Harvard students possibly be unhappy? what do they have to be unhappy about? They thought everyone who'd be taking this class would be taking it because they are already really happy and they want to study about how amazing they are. And they'd like to learn things that they can tell the roommates so clearly that (?) themselves. But it turns out actually over a third of people who took this class last year took the class because they felt depressed. And they were trying to learn about the research about positive psychology. And another third because they wanted to learn about optimism. Another third did it for completely different reasons.

I think. Additional third this year did it because Tal was on the Jon Stewart Daily Show. I am absolutely thrilled about this class. The syllabus which Tal is about to tell you about is.. Actually we learned a couple of other things about you guys. Did you know that of people who take positive psychology, 75% of you are officers of club, 35% of you are the highest ranking officers of club, which means that you think there are about 2000 clubs at Harvard, you are in club of three, and you happen to be the president. We learned other reasons why you are not happy. we learned that the average number of romantic relationships for people to take positive psychology in 4 years is between zero and one. Zero and one. (Tal: No! I don't believe it.) Don't leave. - But that was before taking positive psychology class.\N- That was before taking the class. We are going to test you afterwards. The average number of sexual partners is between zero and .5. I have no idea what .5 sexual partners is. This class is going to be amazing. It was amazing in the past and Tal we actually have extraordinary teaching staff here with us. It's a large teaching staff.

And Tal has actually already given us home works so the teachers are going to be learning not only the material you are doing and talk you about which the experts (?), but learning how to be better teachers. He's given us books to read. He's actually given us assignment. It's a big extraordinary class in that sense. In terms of the syllabus, it's going to be online. Tal just described now we've decided to go green, so no trees are in making of this class except the large auditorium made of wood. Sections-- we are going to try sections online next weekend. So we are going to get the numbers on Wednesday. On following weekend we will be doing sectioning that gives you a very short of turnaround time. But that way you can give me Monday to change your section if you need to, which I hope you won't. And sections will start the following week. Thank you very much. If you have any questions, send me an email.

Ok, so... I think I don't need to explain to you why there is one lecture in the semester that I don't teach and Sean will teach it. And that is the lecture on humor. Figure out why yourselves. I do think you'll have to walk and talk if you are teaching something. The syllabus. The class, is to introduce you to my thinking about the class, is what I call it, integrated class. What that means is that integrated vertically as well as horizontally. Vertically means that every class connected to the next class is connected to every class throughout the semester around a spiral. So what we'll talk about next week, we'll revisit it again in lesson 7, lesson 17 and lesson 24. Everything is interconnected on the higher level on a spiral-- in other words will lead to deep understanding and hopefully assimilation of the material. So it's vertically interconnected. It's also horizontally interconnected. That means every part of the class reinforces and influences the other part.

The lectures, not enough, you'll get a lot more in sections. Sections are mandatory. You'll do a lot of work in your sections, very much related to your response papers that many student claim the most important part of the class. Because

that's where you get the time-in. That's when you really get to chip away. Very much connected to the final project. The final project is a presentation that you'll write out. You don't actually give it but give it to a couple of friends just to get feedback. Not graded on that part. The final project is graded as a final paper, but just what you hand in, what you submit. And the reason why there is a final paper because the best way which is like a presentation, because the best way to learn is to teach. And you'll be teaching these materials to other people -- any material that you are interested in your presentation. So the readings, very much connected and take you to the next level of understanding and assimilation. So any questions before I finish up? Any question from you? Alright. So let me just say-- one second finishing words. I am very excited to be back here. My families are very excited to be back here. Looking forward to a meaningful, pleasurable, enjoyable and happier semester with you. Thank you.