

Positive Psychology – Lecture 8

I ended last time by sharing some biographical details about my life. Some people asked me after, "Are they really true?" So yes, They are absolutely true. And I told the incident from two perspectives— first as a fault finder, and then as a merit finder. Now the important thing to keep in mind when we think about the merit finder is that it's not that the merit finder does not experience pain or disappointment, or anger, or humility, or fear, or disappointment. It's very disappointing to say the least, not to be able to pursue one's goal, if the goal happens to be a professional career in squash. It is very humiliating to be the only person who fails of a program and to have to walk around for a whole year in William James while feeling like you have a horn coming out of head. It's not fun. It's painful. However, the difference between a merit finder, sorry, a benefit finder and a fault finder is that, the benefit finder understands that while things don't necessarily happen for the best, it is possible to make the best of things that happen. Things will be OK. Things will turn out fine. It may take a while. Until I see the benefit of it, it may take a while and I will get over the humiliation or the pain or the disappointment. But that, too, shall pass. In other words, the benefit finder understands that these feelings are temporary, gives him or herself the permission to be human and then understands things will turn out fine at the end. I know that. Been there. Done that. Part of life. Permission to be human, which includes permission to experience these emotions and also the permission to fail. We'll talk a lot about this permission to fail when we talk about perfectionism. Because perfectionism is real intense for your failure or we feel it's all or nothing. Either we have a complete flawless record, or it's useless.

It's either phenomenal, or catastrophe. All or nothing. The benefit finder understands that nature, the human nature dictates that we have painful emotions and human nature, or being human dictates we also fail. And that, too, shall pass. There

are many benefits to be a benefit finder. So the first benefit is we simply feel better. We are happier for it. But there are many many others. For example, Suzanne Thompson from Pomona University did following research, She went to people who had just lost their homes in a fire in California, there were many of them at the time- it was a large wildfire, and many people lost their homes and she interviewed them after that. And she distinguished who were benefit finders and fault finders: the benefit finders didn't say "I'm so glad it happened", but they said "well there are some positive here- I can start a new; it's a fresh start; and now I'll appreciate my home more; my family is OK; and I'm relieved and that's good. So they focused on the positive. When she followed up with these individuals, those who were benefit finders as opposed to fault finders were happier in the long term, were able to, were experiencing more positive moods, and less likely to be anxious and had less physical symptoms. Both psychological as well as physical consequences. Numerous, a lot of research on health benefits-for example, Glenn Affleck did research with individuals who had a heart attack. And there were some individuals who saw it as the catastrophe, the end of the world. There were others who were certainly not happy about it, but said "OK, so this is a wake-up call. It's actually some positive here, because it is telling me I need to take care of myself better".

Or it helped them revise their personal values. Those individuals who saw the positive, the benefit, who are able to see the wake-up call there were more likely to survive 8 years later; less likely to have a second heart attack. Now that sounds pretty obvious, because you know they change their life style. But it's not just about changing life style. Julianne Bower we talked about last time from UCLA looked at AIDS patient and identified the benefit finders there- not the people who said "I'm so glad that I have AIDS", but rather the people who said "as a result of that, I am able to appreciate certain things more; as a result of that, I focus more on the things that really matter; as a result, I am getting closer to certain people". The benefit finders,

when she followed up 4 to 9 years later, the benefit finders were more likely to survive, were more likely to be alive. Research by Laura King and Minor: what they showed was that it can also be used as an intervention. So it's not just people who are born benefit finders or fault finders - and we know there is a genetic component too, but there could be an intervention. So they brought in people who'd experienced traumas in their lives and they had them write about these traumas and their "perceived" benefits of the trauma. Those who wrote about the "perceived benefit" of the trauma were physically healthier and psychologically healthier, happier. Another research on cancer patients. The women came in and wrote about their cancer. And they wrote about "good things that came out of my experience with cancer". The women who wrote about this, visited the doctor office less often, were more likely to survive their cancer. Just by changing their perspective, by changing their focus. Now these women did not say "it happened for the best". Maybe some did; but most did not.

They said "I wish I didn't have this cancer". However it happened, you know. Stuff happens. The question is what we do with it; how we interpret it after. Then they said to themselves "OK, so we get closer to our family; I'm appreciating life so much more now; I can enjoy the breath or flower, or I couldn't before my family so much closer now; I know who my real friends are". And they found benefit in it. Not for the best. But they made the best of the things that happened. And that made the difference even to their mortality rates. There's a lot of research on optimism, benefit-finding and longevity. For example, in a sample of 839 residents in the Mayo clinic, when they looked at them, they identified the benefit finders and fault finders. The benefit finders that are optimists were, after 2 years, were 19% more likely to survive. By far, the most influential and interesting study done in this area of benefit finding and optimism was the nun study. The nun study showed in many ways that the Bible was correct, that joy does prolonged our lives. And the nun study was done, started in

1932. In 1932, 178 nuns who just completed their training- they were around the age of 22, just about to embark on their mission were tested on numerous accounts. One of the things they did was write biographical sketches of themselves. And we had this data for decades. And psychologists just very recently opened up the data and wanted to look at it, wanted to understand what predicts longevity. Which of the nuns are still alive today? How long did they live? OK, this was done in 1932 when they were average age of 22. And they looked for predictors of longevity so they looked at how complex their essays were- in other words, their intellectual capacities, zero correlation to longevity;

They looked at place of residence- maybe they lived in places with less or more pollution that would impact how long they lived, zero correlation- California, Boston, no difference; they looked at how devout they were, their levels of belief at that time at the age of 22- didn't predict longevity. There was one thing and one thing alone that predicted how long they would live. And that was positive feelings. What they did, the researchers, was looking at the biographical sketches-now they had no idea who these women were, so it was a completely blind study- double blind. And they looked, they categorized the writings into four categories: the most positive, the least positive and two categories in between. And then they compared the most positive quartile to the least positive quartile. And here are the results that they found. Let me give you a sample though before so that you get a sense of what a positive sample is and what a less positive sample is. So here is Cecilia Opine from the positive quartile: "God started my life off well by bestowing upon me grace of inestimable value.

"The past year which I spent as a candidate studying at Notre Dame has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of Our Lady and to a life of union with Love Divine." Happy. Joy. Love. This is a positive person. Now here is someone from the least positive quartile. As you'll see,

this is not someone who is particularly negative, but not a person who focuses on positive, on joy, on happiness. Marguerite Donnelly: "I was born on September 26,1909, the eldest of seven children, five girls and two boys. My candidate year was spent in the motherhouse, teaching chemistry and second year Latin at Notre Dame Institute. With God's grace, I intend to do my best for our Order, for the spread of religion and for my personal sanctification." Again, very factual. But not as positive as much of a merit finder, an optimist as Cecilia Opine. Let's look at some of the data now. At the age of 85,at the age of 85—and again, this is a looking back,90% of the most cheerful quartile were alive and just 34% of the least cheerful quartile were alive. This is significant difference. Now that doesn't mean that there aren't some fault finders who lived to 120 and merit finders who died of a heart attack at 30. Of course, there are. But on average, the best predictor what accounts for the most of the variance, in terms of longevity in the study, was positive feelings- positivist in general. Here is 9 years later. Same study. At the age of 94, 54% of the most cheerful quartile were still alive while just 11% of the least cheerful quartile were alive. These are remarkable results. Again, you have some sketches. You analyze them, not knowing who lived and who died. And just based on the single factor- positivist, you are able to predict with remarkable significant levels. You are able to predict longevity- who will be alive and who will not be.

Now when I look at this data- and there's a lot more data on longevity, on health, on well-being, I said to myself," Wow. So this is fantastic! Benefit finding really works! Being an optimistic is good!" And I have two questions then," Why isn't everyone optimistic?" If we become happier, if we become healthier, why not, why aren't we all optimistic? That's the first question. The second question is: alights I want to be more optimistic. How do I become that? So first one: why aren't more people optimistic? Second: how do I become optimistic? I am going to answer these two questions. Let me begin with the first. One of the main reasons why there aren't

more people who are optimistic is that optimists are considered detached. And how do we know that? Well, or what leads to the sense of detachment, to the notion that optimists are detached? It's mostly the media. Because what do we see? We mostly see hatred. We mostly see blood shed. We mostly see unhappiness. We see terrorism. And then, when someone says "well I'm optimistic; I think the world is a good place", that person- what? Are you out of your mind? You are detached Pollyanna. Just look at all the terrible things in the world. How can you be in such a world- how can you be optimistic? How can you be positive? How can you talk about joy and happiness? And positive psychology in a world like this? You must be Pollyannaish. In many ways, the message of Thomas Hobbes is correct: you know, life is short, brutish, nasty and poor. And that seems much more likely to be true than an optimistic sense of life.

Let's look at some of the headlines. I got these just a couple of weeks ago as I was preparing for this particular lecture. So Venezuela. A missing jet. Flight delays. Ok, this is the elections. Fresh violence in Kosovo. So a new state is created, and there is violence. This is the focus. Hundreds of home damaged by quake. And so on. Turkey launches incursion into Iraq. Blood (There will be Blood vs. No Country for Old Man) dual for Oscar. Octant's a good one I guess. Yeah. Tory Spelling dishes... Auklet's move on. So that was CNN. Here is... What was that? Forget which paper I got. I think this is Reuters. Iran nuclear question remains. And you know again, Turkey. Protest embassies. EU. So on and so on. Negativities. This is Fox News. What's the focus? This kid's mom wants out. A mother leaves her child. You know it's not focusing on the millions, billions of mothers who embrace their children. It's the mother who wants out. And then they tell why- you know, what led the mother to want out of this relationship. And so on and so on. So much negative. How can we be positive in a world like this? It would be really unrealistic of us, wouldn't it? Well, I want to show you an excerpt now by my favorite psychologist, Ellen Degeneracy. Ellen Degeneracy (Excerpt from "Here and Now" in 2003): So I was watching the

news the other day. Brought to you by Papal. Well now I need it. Smart advertising.

That's another thing when I was a kid the news was once a day. You either caught it or missed it. Now the news is on 24 hours a day. And that's not enough. They got a guy talking and there's a crawl down there. So you got that guy talking and you got the crawl going and you're online and you put your opinion and you put.. "Nooo!!!I said to that nook...!" There should be one crawl that goes around over and over again: "Things are getting worse". That's all we need. And the local news- man! They want to you to watch every broadcast they've got, don't they? It's not good enough you watch the one you want? They just... These teases get you to watch it later on. They are so incredible cruel. "It could be the most deadly thing in the world that you may be having it for dinner. We'll tell you what it is tonight at 11." Is it ..peas? I feel sorry for the news-casters, you know. We can turn it off. But that's their job and they have to read these stories and they're just coming up at the teleprompter. They don't know what's coming up and they got to go through these range of emotions and that... "There were no survivors. And next, which candy bar helps you lose weight? Still to come, it's an asteroid heading towards earth. But first, where to find the cheesiest pizza in town? Also, a disturbing new study finds that studies are disturbing." She really is one of the most brilliant psychologists I know. And we'll see a lot of her throughout the semester. Now...so the media does it. The media does focus to the great extent on the negative. And that's not just a bad thing. Because one of the roles of media in a civil society is to highlight wrongs that can be righted, to inspire people, to act, to change, to make the world a better place. However, we need to realize that the media doesn't just report reality as it is.

It highlights certain aspects of reality. And there is a media bias involved. Now the media bias is not, you know, left-leaning CNN or Reuters versus right-leaning Fox and Wall Street Journal. That's not the bias I am talking about. I am talking about bias

toward the negative. The media focuses, highlights the negative. It acts as a magnifying glass rather than as a looking glass. And we need to keep that in mind, and to correct for that. The media doesn't just reflect reality as it is. Reality is not the FrontPage of the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. That's not reality. That's highlighting a specific area of reality and magnifying it. It accentuates the negative, focuses on the negative- the war in, with Turkey, or, the blood spilled in Kosovo, or the mom leaving her child. The hatred. And what it does, when it does that, is also under represent the positive. Now if you think about it, this is exactly two of the three mental distortions that we talked about. Magnifying the negative. Minimizing the positive. In other words, what the media does is to distort our perception. It actually makes us into pessimists, especially because the news is on 24 hours a day. And we are constantly bombarded by negativity after negativity after negativity. And where do we get the positive? 30 seconds at the end of the news. Oh yes, there's also a little bit good stuff going on. And it's just to make you smile so that you come back tomorrow or the next hour for more bad news. Negativity after negativity after negativity. Distorting. Creating these cognitive distortions, the psychological traps that we talked about under cognitive behavior, under cognitive therapy.

And we become pessimistic. Is it any wonder that most people are pessimistic when the media has such an impact on us? Again, not to belittle the role of the media. But what I am doing is highlighting certain aspect that we need to be cognizant of, that we need to counter. And how we counter- we'll talk about it in a minute. So what does the media highlight? The frauds- Martha Stewart, or Enron, or WorldCom. Highlighting these frauds, but not reporting on the millions and billions of honest transactions that takes place everyday, right now as we speak. Highlighting the negative. Ignoring the positive. Millions and billions of honest transactions taking place all the time, all around us constantly. Now what else is happening? What we are doing, what the media is helping us to do is extrapolate from a few instances where

people want to hurt, while ignoring the millions and billions of people who are dedicating their lives to helping spread the happiness in the world, whether it's in soup kitchens to help the world a better place, or whether it's writing in our back yard. Over 1800 Harvard students volunteer as part of Phillips Brooks House. Remember the false stereotype that I talked about- whether it's here at Harvard or in the United States, so many people dedicate so much time to helping.

And yet the focus is on the few that hurt. And that creates certain scheme in our mind while we think the world must be a bad place. The focuses are on terrorism primarily. But what about the millions and billions of people who want to live in peace? Again, this doesn't mean this is one important role of the media. At the same time, we shouldn't also ignore the good. The focus in media is mostly on people hurting other people. For example, through rape, while ignoring millions and billions of people who are making love everyday. And not just in fairy tales, people all over the world- I've no idea who they are. I hope they are not in the classroom. There is Google image. And not just around the world. Also, right here- in Harvard yard. I don't know if they still have this survey, but the last one I found online was 04. I don't know what happened since. Now for those of you who don't believe that there are people also at Harvard right here who make love. Here is a proof of positive that some do. He's so cute. And the baby is adorable. OK. OK. OK. Now what I'm saying here is not that we need to ignore the bad, not that we need to ignore what's not working. We should focus on it. We should look at it. We should improve the world. At the same time, we should also understand that people who say to the optimist, to the benefit finder "Get real" are actually missing the point. Because it's not the benefit finder who's detached. It's the fault finder who is. Because there is much more good in the world than bad. Much more. In fact, it's not just about focusing on the "full half" or, the "full half". It's focusing on the 90%. Because there is a lot more good than bad in our world. And it's important not just because it is a nice thing to do, not just because

it makes us healthier and happier. It's important because focus creates reality.

I mean we saw it on so many levels. We saw it with the children on the bus that we didn't notice. We saw it when it came to Mara Collins who said "let's focus on the seed of greatness in these individuals". We saw it with the research on resilience when the focus was on "why are so many failing" versus "what make some individuals succeed" despite the unfavorable circumstances. Focus creates reality. Also, think about it. I mean when we read about frauds and dishonesty in newspaper constantly, what we begin to believe- what we naturally begin to believe is "well, you want to be successful? You want to become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, like Enron? You have to engage in fraud. There is no real other way to succeed. Why? Because the millions of other people who are succeeding honestly are not reported on, are mostly not reported on. And that's what we focus on. Not to say it's not important to have whistle blower and to talk about these things. It's equally important though to also focus on those who do it honestly and well, because there are vast majority, way over 90%. Because if we don't, then the person will think "well, if I want to succeed in business, then you know I have to bend the rules".

And when an ethical decision comes up, when he or she becomes the manager at the age of 35, they say "well, the only way to succeed is I bend the rules slightly". And that creates self-fulfilling prophecy. Or, how many people here- seriously show of hands- once thought of going into politics, becoming governor, or President, or Prime Minister? How many people thought of going...No, other than me. OK, quite a lot. I mean, we know that, at Harvard, there are quite a few... Now out of those who put the hands up, how many people were told by others "you shouldn't go into politics- you are too honest"? Too honest. You know, we hear it all the time. And that becomes self-fulfilling prophecy, because many honest people who could potentially make the world a better place by going into politics don't go in. Because "politicians are

crooks". Well, politicians are not crooks. Yes, there are politicians who are crooks, but they are the minority. The majority do honest work, want to make the world a better place. They surely make mistakes. They are human after all, but with good intentions, within ethical code. You know it's a wonder that there is so much good in our world, while the focus is so much on the bad. It really is a wonder to me. It just shows how powerful human nature, and how powerful the good part of our nature is, because we can sustain goodness. Also, how about this?- The constant chattering in our mind is "why didn't I do this? Why haven't I done the reading yet? Why haven't I completed my paper? Why did I say that to that person? Why did she said that back to me?" Mostly, negative chatter.

How often do we have the chatter "well you know I have a really lovely conversation today"? Or "you know, I just finish so much work- I was productive. I did so well." "Wow, I just got an A- and I didn't even work that hard for it."

I mean, of course, not here, but seen other places. Why don't we have these kind of chattering in our mind? Again, because our schema focuses on negative. We are going to talk about change next week and we'll understand there are actual neural pathways that have been created by media, by the focus on what is not working. Having created it so we gravitate toward becoming fault finders. How we change that? We'll talk about that in a minute. It's important to focus on the good. You know what they say about Handy? That the most important thing that he did for his country that he made India proud of itself. He made India proud of itself. That is so important to do. What about America? Are you proud of America? Do we living here or, as Americans, the majority here, do you make America proud of itself? Because you know America has faults. It is not a perfect country. It has made mistakes from 1776 and will continue to make mistakes for, hopefully for many years to come. But still, I would argue, the greatest country in the world. So many people want to come here,

want to live here. Why? Because of the freedom. Because of the opportunities. Again, not perfect, but a great country. Do we appreciate America? Do we appreciate its greatness? Because if we don't, we can pay a high price. It's in vogue now "US bashing" in this country. In this place. And the problem is when we just focus on bashing, when we just focus on the negative, we create a worse reality rather than improving the reality. So yes, we need to be critical. And one of the virtues of this great country is that you can stand out in the street or write in articles and criticize the politicians, the system, other people. It's one of the great contributions of this country: free speech. But at the same time, we also have the freedom and we should exercise the freedom to focus on what is working on the good. Because appreciating is important, whether it's a country, whether it's a relationship, whether it's individual, whether it's students, whether it's teachers. Appreciation is important.

The meaning of "appreciate" from dictionary: valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. So the first meaning of appreciate is to say thank you. That's a nice thing to do, but it's much more than just a nice thing to do. We talked about this before. The second meaning of appreciate is increasing value: the economy appreciates; money in the bank appreciates. And that's an important meaning, because when we appreciate the good, the good appreciates. When we appreciate the good in our lives, when we appreciate the good in other people, when you appreciate the good in our country, we get more of it. Unfortunately, the opposite is also the case. When we don't appreciate something, whether it's ourselves, whether it's our country, whether it's our relationship, the good depreciates. Remember I talked about it in the past. Is it any wonder so many relationships flounder, fail after the honeymoon phase? If the main question becomes "what's wrong?" or "How can we improve the relationship?" and if we just ask this question, our focus becomes on what is not working, on the

weaknesses. And we ignore the virtues, the strength, the things that worked and are working. And when we don't focus on these things, they depreciate. As far as we are concerned, they don't exist, just like the children on the bus that not exist for you as far as you were concerned. What appreciating does is in essence create a growth spiral.

Let me expand. Let me just give you a random example. Let's say, Monday morning, or Tuesday morning, you are walking toward 1504. And suddenly you see a friend of yours. A friend of yours you know who's genuine, is real- someone you trust. And your friend looks at you and says," Wow. You look fantastic!" NOW, how do you feel at that point? You feel fantastic. And you know you walk a little bit more pride, more proud and you walk into the classroom just here. And another friend sees you and says," Wow! You look fantastic!" And how do you feel at this point? Well,fantastic-er! And then you come in. You sit down here. And another friend who you haven't seen for a month sees you, "Wow! You look fantastic!" And how do you feel at this point? Fantastic-its! And so on and so on and so on- made you day in an upward spiral. Now think about a slightly different scenario. You walk in 1504 on Thursday morning. And suddenly a friend of yours whom you trust and value sees you and says,"oh my God, what's wrong?"

Now there may have been nothing wrong before; there is a lot wrong now. And you walk in the door, and someone sees you and says,"oh my Lord." And how do you feel? You feel even worse. And you sit down and you see someone else who looks at you, just completely shocked. And you are feeling worse-r and worse-its. And so on and so on and so on in a downward spiral. Appreciation creates upward spiral. And we know,sometimes,one sentence, one word at the beginning of the day- and you have a wonderful day, or week. This research showing how a single sentence very often can impact an entire life. This is work done by Bandera. Single sentence of appreciation

can give us strength to go on. Now the key here: it has to be genuine appreciation. One of the things we'll talk about when we discuss self-esteem is how destructive and harmful in genuine appreciation is. And now I am not talking about your boyfriend or girlfriend ask you "so how do I look" having just come out, come back from a day and worn something the whole night. You are not going to tell them "well, actually awful". So OK. We are not talking about these grey areas. But it has to be real. It has to be connected to reality. We'll talk about that much more when we talk about self-esteem. The key though is that you need to understand there is always something real to appreciate. Think about the study with the cancer patients, or AIDS patients. Even they were able to find something good in a very difficult, tragic scenario, situation. And when they appreciate the good, when they find benefit in that situation, the good appreciates. It grows.

Orphan real benefit finder: "What you focus on expands, and when you focus on the goodness in your life, you create more of it. Opportunities, relationships, even money flowed my way when I learned to be grateful no matter what happened in my life." Because what we focus on appreciates. Again, the metaphor that I have been talking about throughout the course: the seed- what happens to a seed if we don't water it? If we don't shed a light on it? What happens to that seed is that it withers and dies. And that, unfortunately, is the fate of most human potential. Most relationship potential. Most countries. And if we want it to grow, want it to blossom, we have to shed a light on it. We have to water it. This is exactly what Mara Collins did with the seed of greatness that existed in every one of her students. This is what the Pygmalion, the classic experiment showed, was that when teachers were made to focus on the potential in those individuals who were deemed "fast sputters". When they were made to focus on it, to shed a light on- when a light is shed on their potential, that's when the children grew. That's when they fulfilled much more of their potential. So how do we correct the false schema? What do we do about it? Let me share with you

something on the societal level, something on the individual level. On the societal level, create good news. Not enough of it around. Now people say it's not marketable, it's boring- wallow. A lot of it is not marketable. Part of it is because it is the norm, it's the usual. But why not report on the great technical advances that are making life better?

Why not report much more on the great medical advances? Why not report much more on peace? And well-being? You know a situation stops being interesting once there is peace. It's interesting when there's a war. Well why not focus more on these areas? Here is a newspaper that was started online- Good News Network, that I highly recommend you to go onto. Just in a couple of last years it was started. Getting people to focus on what is working. You know about Albert Einstein, about Cambodia gaining independence on that day in '53. Berlin Wall. You know, focusing, reminding ourselves of historical good as well as on present good and they have great news that they talk about. Another, Geemundo, another, I don't even know what that means but another online newspaper that focuses on things that work. Why not start a day with that, well, in addition to opening the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. Looking at that as well. Just to counter the negative schema. Art. So important. So important in creating a better world, in changing our internal schema. Look at the light in Vermeer's- Renaissance artist in his picture A light during a time when there was not much light. I mean consider the Dark Ages. The Middle Ages. But the artists focused on what is working on the light, on the human potential and paved the way the Renaissance. It all started with arts. Or in 18th and 19th century, Romantics. Beethoven or Victor Hugo. They encountered a harsh reality. But they focused also on heroic, on the great, on the human potential. Aristotle once said, "fiction is more important than history." Because history depicts life as it is, where the fiction depicts life as it can or ought to be. As it can or ought to be. The human potential. And that paved the way to much higher levels of freedom and equality in the world.

Or 1930s' America, in many ways the heyday of Hollywood were directors like Cukor, Capra, Sturges, created masterworks during a time when there was Great Depression. And people used to go to the cinema and watched these films to inspire them and helped them get through the difficult time- it was also between the two- you know, the Great War and the WWII. Difficult time in the world. World recovering and then plunging into another war. And yet the artists continued to inspire. Not ignoring what is not working. Not ignoring, but improving. That, by the way, is my favorite movie, Sullivan's Travels. Modern art as well. Wouldn't it be lovely if we go into a gallery and we feel inspired by the art- whether it's by photography, whether it's by sculpting, whether it's by movies or books? There has be much more of it. Again, one of the roles of the artists is also to highlight what is not working so that it is improved. But if an artist, if an individual is really concerned about improving the good in the world, it is not enough to only focus or highlight what's not working. Because if we don't highlight the good, if we don't appreciate the good as well, the good depreciates. Positive psychology- this is what it is very much about. Remember there are two things that positive psychologists do. What they study the first thing that they do is focusing on what works. Second thing that they do is focusing on the extraordinary on the tip of the stem. And by doing that, the words of Miriam, they democratize excellence. Because they are focusing on the good, not ignoring what works in each individuals, not ignoring the extraordinary individuals, the Mara Collins of the world, the resilient kids in at-risk population and so on.

Another reason in addition to media why we tend to ignore the good and focus mostly on the bad is that we adapt. We adapt to what is common and what drives us, what's interesting to us is the uncommon. The exception rather than the rule. And because there is so much more good in the world- it's so much more common, we adapt to it. We stop seeing it after a while, whereas the bad- the exception always captures our attention. Why? Because nature create us such that we are changed

detectors. We are changed detectors. And whenever there is a change, our mind immediately goes to that change. Something different that happens, whether it's something we see, or something we hear (sound: car alarm set off in the background) for those of you who were asleep.

It's the exception that wakes us up. And that's a good thing. It's a good thing that nature creates us that way. Because it helps us in case of danger. Because it helps us for example, hear when there is a lion coming toward us or trying to creep up toward us. It helps us smell poison. Something that is different, that changed. It also helps us hear a sleeping baby it's incredible how this works. Fast asleep- you know there, there can be- the house may be falling. You don't get up, but there is a baby crying and you are up in a second. We are change detectors. And nature created us such- or God has created us such so that we can survive better. Now it's actually a good thing that we adapt on a few levels. First of all, if we didn't adapt, if we are hearing all the noises, we will quite literally go nuts. Because there are so many noises right now going on in addition to what you are listening to. People typing. People breathing. Once in a while car from the outside. And we would go crazy if we were always attune to everything that was going on. So it's good that we adapt. That's why people can live literally on the highway and still fall asleep at night. Because after a month or so, they stop hearing the cars there. We have relatives in Concord, who live quite literally on top of the train. And we went to visit him for dinner and a train passes by. And you know the house shakes. And it's enormous noise. And at the beginning of the time, we looked at each other, and he smiled. And second time the train goes by. The house shakes and huge noise. And I couldn't help myself and said, "Doesn't that bother you?" And he said, "What?" He didn't know what I was talking. I said, "The train just passed." He said, "Oh. We don't notice it anymore because it passes every half an hour or every 20 minutes." They don't notice it. So good thing that we can adapt. Also in terms of difficulty. Personally the most difficult experience that I endured was on the 19th of

September, the 19th of December, 1997. I was living in Singapore at the time. My best friend was coming over from Indonesia to visit me. The person who was the most important to me at that time and her plane crashed. Silk Air Flight MI 185. Some of you may remember this. And my world crumbled. For the first time in my life, I felt that I didn't want to go on anymore. I had no energy. And I called up my family. And I called up another person who had made a lot of difference in my life, Nathaniel Brandon, for various reasons.

First of all, Nathaniel Brandon had just- he's a well-known author and psychologist- he's just visited Singapore. He just met Bonny. And I called him up because he was a psychologist whom I thought could help me. But also because at the age of 45, he lost his wife who drowned in a pool when she had apoplectic fit. He found her drowned when he came back home in their pool, in their home. So he'd been through that, but 25 years earlier. So I wanted to talk to him to get his advice. I was on the phone and could hardly get my words across- I was crying constantly. And he said to me, "Tal, what I am going to tell you now is not going to make sense. But it's true. You are going to get over this. I know you are. We get over losses. It's difficult. It's painful. Cry. Give the emotions their spaces. But you are going to get over it. We get over painful emotions. We all do. Because if we hadn't, then God help us all." Because if we hadn't, then God help us all. And it took a long time. It was after 3 months that I could start working again. It took a whole year for me to feel some of the bounds, some of the passion for life that I felt before. But now I think about Bonny. And I smiled wistfully, sadly. But I can also appreciate the good times that we have together. And the privilege that I had of meeting her. We adapt and that's a good thing. That's an important thing. Because God help us all if we hadn't. There is another side though to that equation. There is another side. When we adapt, we also take things for granted. And that's not a good thing. Because we take for granted our family that we care about so much. And we take for granted our friends. And we take

for granted the food we are about to have in the dinning hall that is served to us. What a luxury.

And we take for granted the person who's sitting next to us. And we take for granted the classes we take here. Because we adapt. And it's a good thing when it comes to the negatives. It's not such a good thing when we take life for granted. And the question we need to ask is: is it possible to have it all? Is it possible to adapt to the negatives, but at the same time, not to adapt as much to the positive. There's a story in the Jewish tradition about a man who is living in one of the shtets, one of the villages in Eastern Europe. And he really had it bad. I mean he was living in a tiny home with many kids, with a wife who was constantly nagging him. They were constantly fighting. And they were really terrible. And that man wanted to improve his lot so he went to the rabbi and recounted him how terrible his life is. He said "look. We live in a small home. The kids are all over. You know no privacy whatsoever. My wife nags constantly. Rabbi, help!" So the rabbi said, "in your yard, do you have a chicken?" So he said, "yes, we have chicken." "For the next week, bring the chicken into your home." "But rabbi, what are you talking about? We have no yard..." "Bring the chicken into your home." The person was a devout man, believing his rabbi, brought the chicken for the whole week in their home. Feathers. Dirt. Stinks. You name it. The kids continue to fight even more. His wife nags even more. "what are you doing to us here? Our house is small as it is." "The rabbi said." And they continue to fight, and bickering.

The week finally ends. And he runs to the rabbi and said, "rabbi, help!" And the rabbi said, "how are things going?" He said, "Well, worse! No place at home. We are fighting. It stinks. It's terrible." "My child, do you have a cow in your backyard?" "Yes, rabbi. We have a cow." "Well, bring her into the house in addition to the chickens for the week." "Rabbi, but..." "Just do it." So he brings in the cow. And again,

it's awful. It stinks to the tenth degree in his nose. And they don't even sleep for the whole week. And it's terrible. By the end of the week, you know he's looking terrible, disheveled. He stinks. He goes to the rabbi and says, "rabbi, help! Situation is terrible. Yes, it's so much worse." "Do you have a horse in your backyard?" "Yes, rabbi. We do. But now I understand the pattern here." "Take the horse and bring it into your house." So he takes the horse and brings it into the house. And it's awful. The horse is kicking and yelling and jumping and breaks stuff. And there's mess and chaos and bickering and... So much worse. And finally the week ends. He runs to the rabbi. And the rabbi says, "how are you doing?" "Rabbi, it's terrible! It's awful!" "OK. For the next week, why don't you take out all the animals and come and see me then?" At the end of the week, he comes and the rabbi says, "how are things going?" "Rabbi, it's wonderful. We have so much place. The smell is so good. We are getting along now like we hadn't ever before. The kids are happy. Thank you so much, rabbi." Now here is the question.

Do things need to get worse before we appreciate what's right in front of us and all around us? When do we begin to appreciate our health? When do we begin to appreciate our health? When something goes wrong with us or with someone else. When do we begin to appreciate life? When ours is in danger, or when we lose someone dear to us. And the question that we need to ask ourselves is "must something external, extraordinary, unusually tragic happen for us to appreciate the ordinary?" You see there are treasures of happiness all around us and within us, right next to us- in the dining hall, sitting next to you here, in your room at home. There are wonderful things- things that are worth your appreciation all around us or within us. But we take them for granted and do we need to wait for that. And the answer is no. No- if we learn gratitude as a way of life, if we cultivate the habit of gratitude. It is just as the media has cultivated the fault finding. We can cultivate the benefit finding. We can cultivate grateful.

Because when we are grateful for something, we do not- we no longer take it for granted. G. K. Chesterton: "You say grace before meals. All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink. Gratitude produced some...produced the most purely joyful moments that have been known to man." Think about it. Think about the last time you are grateful to someone. And you expressed that gratitude. How did you feel? And how did you make the other person feel? Or someone who was grateful to you and appreciated you? You were walking on air, created this upward spiral as a result. When it's genuine, when it's real. We don't do it enough. We don't do enough appreciation. We don't express gratitude enough, whether it's to the food that we eat, whether it's to writing, whether it's for our friends or family. So this is the most wonderful books written about the power of gratitude- it's not a research book, but a lot of these ideas that I'll talk about in a minute have researched. "About Gratitude" by Brother David Steindl-Rast. He also has a great website. If you Google his name. How do we cultivate gratitude? His advice is simple and gracious. "Why not start by surveying a typical day? What is it that you tend to tackle with spontaneous mindfulness, so that without effort your whole heart is in it? the way it warms you and wakes you up, or taking your dog for a walk, or giving a little child a piggyback ride. It is a matter of practice of doing it over and over again till it becomes second nature." Till it becomes a habit. Till we take a stake of gratitude and turn it into a gratitude trait. And it is possible to do it.

One of the ways to do it is to identify everyday just one or two things to do mindfully, to focus on them, whether it's the first cup of coffee in the dinning hall, whether it's the walk to class, whether it's 10 minutes in the afternoon when you just listen to the music in your room, by yourself with your eyes closed and focused,

appreciating your favorite piece. Taking our time to not just become wine connoisseurs but also life connoisseurs. This course is in many ways about life appreciation. He continues,(Brother David Steindl-Rast): "Gratefulness is the measure of our aliveness. Are we not dead to whatever we take for granted? So Irvin Yalom,Stanford psychiatrist did a lot of research on terminally ill patients. He went to people who had 3 months, 6 months, up to a year to live, and researched this population. And what he found time and again is that these people, time and again were something to the effect of "for the first time in my life, I feel that I am alive." "For the first time in my life, I feel that I am alive." Why? "Because for the first time, I appreciate breathing." "For the first time in many years, I appreciate my husband, my wife, my friend, my children" Flower. The grass. The conversation. For the first time of my life, I appreciate it, whereas before, the focus was just not there. It was other things. On the difficulties, the hardships- mostly on the negative. And remember, as far as you are concerned, the children on a bus did not exist. As far as most people are concerned, the good things in their life, in their relationships, do not exist. Because when we are not grateful for them, when we take them for granted, as far as we are concerned, they are not there. And we are numb to these things. We are dead to these things. And it takes a wake-up call, like a terminal disease to wake us up? To get us to focus on what is right inside us or all around us all the time? Why? Why wait? Why wait? There's a lot of research on the value of gratitude. You've read one before.

You'll be reading one of the articles by Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough from UC Davis. Let me summarize two studies there into one. So what they did was essentially take random group of people and divide them into four groups. First group every night before going to bed write at least five things for which you are grateful. Big things, or little things. Second group write at least five hassles in your life- five bad things that happen to you. Third group write at least five things that you are better than others at- superior to others. And the fourth group- control group

write about anything that happen to you during the day. The outcome measures are that they looked at what optimism, happiness, physical health (how often they visited the doctor of the six months of the study, one of the studies), how generous and benevolent they were toward other people and finally how likely they were to achieve their goals that they set for themselves- in other words, how successful they were. The group that performed the worst was the hassles group. Five bad things that happen to you. The group that performed the best that is happiest, most optimistic, most likely to achieve their goals, most generous and benevolent toward other people and healthiest, was the group every night before going to bed wrote at least five things for which they were grateful. Both psychological and health benefits.

The study was, in many ways the beginning, one of the first studies they conducted. The book just came out recently, called "Thanks" by Robert Emmons, which is wonderful and traces through a lot more studies and research and exercise that you can do to become more grateful, to have gratitude as a way of life. Physiological benefits such as our heart variability, which is a predictor of longevity, which is a predictor of health is increased. The parasympathetic system increases when we are grateful. And that induces calm. And that strengthens our immune system. There are also many benefits to trait gratefulness, so it is not just a state of being. It's also about the trait. How do we cultivate that? How do we cultivate that? By doing it over and over again. I do this every night. I've been doing it since 19th of September, 1999. Since 19th of September, 1999, I've been doing it. I've been doing it long before the 2002 study. I started to do it when Oprah told me to do it. Really. I've been doing it ever since. Let me share with you what I wrote about last night. It was 26 last night. OK. So God, family, To mush my love- my wife, yoga- I did yoga, David- so wonderful, Serial- precious (my two children), office hours- I had office hours yesterday and I enjoyed it a lot. Beep- sorry. Another beep- sorry. some censorship in this class is important. It took you a while but eh.. OK. Beep- no just

kidding about this one. And Tommy's soup. She made this unbelievable pea soup which I had yesterday. You know, big things and little things. Big things and little things. And here are other things that I am grateful for right now. I am grateful for Shawn Anchor, the head TF of the class. (Applause) I am grateful for his work, for his inspiration. I am grateful to Debby, the head of TF of the other class. (Applause) I am grateful to the teaching fellows who are investing so much time in your education, in your happiness in this course. (Applause and cheers)

I am grateful to Barry who's there behind the scenes. You don't see him much. But he's responsible for so much what's happening for his support, for how humble he is, doing all that. (Applause) And I am grateful for my students, because it wouldn't be a class- I wouldn't be here today, doing what I love to, what I care about most if you weren't here. So thank you. I am grateful. (Applause) Now the key with this is to do it as well. Yes is it cheesy? Absolutely. Does it make a difference? Absolutely. You know every night I also do it with my kid, with David. And how do I do it? I ask David- he's three and a half years old, "what was fun for you today?" And he tells me and he asks me, "what was fun for you today?" I learned about it from a friend of mine whoa hand worker- who was here just a couple of classes ago. He was visiting. And I came over for dinner one day. He heard me speak about this. And he said, "I want to show you something." And he has two young kids. And they were standing around and talking about the five grateful, things for which they were grateful. These were young kids. Daniel and Maya. And I looked at it and I started to cry. It was so moving and so touching. And I've been doing it ever since with my kids. My wife do it every day on regular basis. She puts up with my cheesiness. It helps. It works because

We don't take the good things in our life for granted. The key when we do this is to maintain freshness. How do we maintain freshness? One of the things that happens

with this exercise is that it very often becomes a habit and we lose it. We lose the freshness of it. We lose the mindfulness of it. And we just take it for granted as an exercise. And the key is, one of the things that Lyubomirsky says, well, try to do it once a week. For some people, once a week is actually better than doing it every day. However, there's also a price. It's much less likely to become a trait if we only do it once a week. So how do we maintain freshness? Doing it every single day. How do I maintain freshness? Well, fortunately, there's a lot of research on this topic- some of them by Lyubomirsky, as well as by others. The first thing is introduce the variety. So let's say I write about Serial and there's something that I write about every day. It's Serial my daughter, David my son. It's Tommy my wife. It's God. I write about these things every single day. And I write about other things as well. I can write about different aspects of these things. So one day I can write about Serial's smile. You know her beautiful, one year old, toothless smile. And another day I can write about the fact that she's taken her first steps now. So vary. Or one day I can write about, focus... One week I can focus about my work. Another week it can be mostly focus about personal things. And so on. Variety really is the spice of life- makes a difference here.

Second, Ellen Langer talks about mindfulness. she defines mindfulness as creating novel distinctions. It's similar to creating variety. Looking at the things that I haven't seen before, that I haven't looked at before. This is also a way to maintain love. You know people talk about how over time you become, you adapt to your relationships. well, there's something new to discover about a person every time, whether it's about my parents, whether it's about lover, whether it's about my friends. Creating novel distinctions. Looking at it mindfully. Focusing on it. And maintaining freshness through this focus. Visualizing it. Steven Roslyn from William James Hall, head of our department did research, showing that kids actually visualize most words. So when you see- let's say mother, immediately the picture of mother comes up. Or

it's very often for us when we talk these words unautomatic, we no longer visualize it, which is why it takes kids longer to think. Because they are still visualizing the words. It is not unautomatic anymore, which also explains why kids live like kids, why they are able to appreciate the simplest of things, to be mesmerized by airplane up there. Or when they talk about what they did at day care. They live like children. And what we have become over the years. We adapt to it. We become numb to a lot of these things. So one of the ways to chip away the numbness, one of the ways to do it is to visualize. And when we visualize, we start to see things once again like kids do. Next time we'll continue with this.

But I want to end today by sharing a story with you. A story about the person who, to me more than anyone else captures what benefit finder is. A person who is my role model when it comes to focusing also on the good. My grandmother was born in 1915 in Sighet, Romania. She had a very regular childhood. She was the youngest daughter of 7- one more sisters, 5 more bothers. And they were doing well. Many of her brothers became important rabbis, violinists, musicians. And she was a young girl, happy, living a normal life, until 1940 which was when Hitler invaded Romania. Hitler invaded Romania and her life changed radically. Her entire family was taken to one concentration camp after the other, ending up in Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, she had over a dozen nieces and nephews were all murdered. Her five brothers and parents were murdered in front of her very eyes. At the end of the war, somehow, she and her sister survived. The British came to Auschwitz to liberate the prisoners. And when they came, they came in with a doctor. And the doctor would go through the prisoners. Most of them were of course dead; those who were alive, he would say take that person, leave that person here. Because they had limited resources, limited places. Those prisoners who they thought would not survive, they left them there. And it came to my grandmother, who weighed the time 26 kilos which is 54 pounds. My grandmother was a large woman- 54 pounds. And said, leave. And then he saw her

sister who was right next to her, who weighed 36 kilos- 79 pounds. And he said, he made this motion to put her on the truck. And of course, she was too weak to get out.

So the British soldiers picked up my grandmother's sister whose name is Shanti. They picked Shanti up and Shanti held on to her sister. And she wouldn't let go. And they tried to open her grip. And even though she was weak and sick, they couldn't open her grip. So the doctor said, fine, take them both. So they took them both. And they put them on the truck. And they were, of course, certain that my grandmother would die. A month passed and she survived though she didn't put on a single gram. Any day they thought she would die, but she refused to die. After three months, she started putting on weight. She survived. Six months later, she went back to Sighet, to see what was remained from her home. She arrived there, got off the cart with the horse. And the man by the name of Joseph- Jose saw her. And he saw a woman who was stooped, who still had no hair. But he recognized those eyes. Because those eyes were proud. And those eyes were alive. He recognized Goldie. And he took her with him. And two weeks later, they got married. And Goldie got better and got pregnant and gave birth to a stillborn. And she got pregnant again and once again gave birth to a stillborn. They made their way to Tel Aviv from Romania. They were caught by the British. It was British mandate at that time. They were caught by British and sent back to a concentration camp in Cyprus. And there, in the concentration camp, my grandmother in Cyprus had another baby. A baby girl who survived. And then they had another boy who was stillborn. And my grandmother could have no more children. Her body had endured too much. My grandmother survived and thrived.

As did Shanti. Shanti could have no children, but my mother was her child too. And I was her grandchild as well. I remember, this was in October of 1988. Shanti had passed away a few years earlier. And we went to the cemetery on the day that she passed away, to say some prayers over her tombstone. And I went with my

grandmother. And we walked there. And my grandmother stool in front of the tombstone. And on the tombstone, we engraved not just Shanti's name, but the names of all the brothers and her parents. And she looked at the tombstone- and I thought she talked to Shanti- and said to her, "we are so fortunate, aren't we? We are so lucky. And look Talk is here." She called me Talk. And then she told her what I was doing. And she told her what my brothers and sisters were doing- their grandchildren. And about my mother and father. And how wonderful thing were. And she was talking about the wonderful things. And she was crying once in a while, missing Shanti. She was so human, just standing there, and talking half Yiddish, half Hebrew. Once in a while, talking to me. And to her sister who saved her life. And she said to me," let's go." And we walked together. Thousands of tombs around us. We walked along the path toward the car. It was a beautiful October day. The sun was out. The wind was blowing. The trees were swinging. And she suddenly stopped. She stopped and looked up. And she stood so proud, so poised. And she held my hand so tight, looking up and looking at me. She sais, "Tal, it's such a beautiful world. Just a pity we have to leave." And she smiled. And we walked. My grandmother saw thousands of corpse. She saw her family murdered in front of her very eyes. She had three stillborn children. She did not ignore the terrible things in life. How could she? However, at the same time, she also refused to ignore the good things in life. The wonderful things in life. And she was grateful. And she survived. My grandmother told me that this is a beautiful world. I believe her. Thank you.(Applause)