



HOW HAPPINESS THINKS

A NEW SIX-SESSION COURSE

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JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Co-Authored By:

Casey Skvorc, PhD, JD
Rabbi Mordechai Dinerman

In Consultation with:

David Pelcovitz, PhD

Accreditation Statement:



This activity has been planned and implemented through a joint sponsorship of the Washington School of Psychiatry (WSP) and the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (JLI). WSP is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists, and by the California Board of Behavioral Sciences as provider #5691 of continuing education to social workers and counselors in California. WSP is also a National Board for Certified Counselors-Approved Continuing Education Provider, and is accredited by MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society of Maryland to provide continuing medical education for physicians.



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- > The American Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME)
- > The California Board of Behavioral Sciences (CBBS)



and up to 9 CE credits from:

- > The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)

COURSE BACKGROUND

Is Happiness a Worthwhile, Attainable Goal?

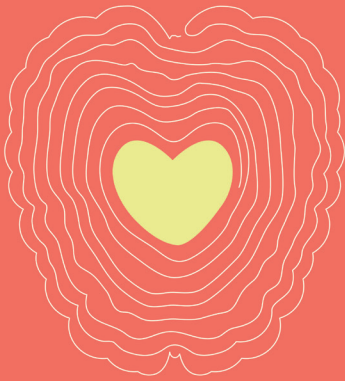
Since Professor Tal Ben-Shahar's wildly popular Positive Psychology course at Harvard University caught the nation's attention in 2006, the public has been devouring books on the topic. People seek answers to: What makes happy people different from unhappy people? To what degree do our circumstances (family, education, career, etc.) matter for our overall happiness? Can a person be happy despite going through difficulty? A new six-week course by The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute, *How Happiness Thinks*, addresses this very important and highly-relevant subject and also asks: Is Judaism more concerned with human ethics or human happiness? Does G-d care whether people are happy?

The Focus of Traditional Psychology Has Changed

For the last half century, psychology has been consumed with a single topic only—mental illness—and has done fairly well with it... [However,] relieving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority. But people want more than just to correct their weaknesses. They want lives imbued with meaning. . . .

(Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* [New York: The Free Press, 2002], p. xi)





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Positive Psychology is Relevant to Clinicians

A meta-analysis of 51 [Positive Psychology] interventions with 4,266 individuals was conducted...to provide practical guidance to clinicians. The results revealed that Positive Psychology interventions do indeed significantly enhance well-being and decrease depressive symptoms. . . . Accordingly, clinicians should be encouraged to incorporate Positive Psychology techniques into their clinical work, particularly for treating clients who are depressed, relatively older, or highly motivated to improve.

(Nancy L. Sin and Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Enhancing Well-Being and Alleviating Depressive Symptoms with Positive Psychology Interventions: A Practice-Friendly Meta-Analysis, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, May 2009, 65(5):467-87)

Therapy Should Be Sensitive to the Client's Beliefs

"Clearly, many clients, especially the highly spiritual, believe that religious and spiritual issues not only are acceptable and preferable for discussion in therapy but also are important therapeutic factors, central to the formation of worldview and personality and impacting human behavior. Psychologists who provide psychotherapeutic services need to be sensitive to client's needs to address religious and spiritual issues; those who provide training to future counseling psychologists need to prepare students to deal with these issues; and researchers need to identify the therapeutic aspects of religion and spirituality in counseling."

(Rose, E. M., Westefeld, J. S., & Ansley, T. N., "Spiritual issues in counseling: Clients' beliefs and preferences," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48:61-71 (2001))

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

How to Enhance Happiness and Human Flourishing

1. How does a healthy adult infuse happiness, meaning and purpose into his/her life? What are the core methods of Positive Psychology that can help them attain these goals?

How to Incorporate Positive Psychology with Cultural Sensitivity

2. Considering that religion and spirituality might be important therapeutic factors, what are the cultural and religious values of those whose worldview is shaped by Judaic values? How do their beliefs affect their approach to therapy? And how might Positive Psychology interventions help such people?

How can mental health professionals best incorporate these Positive Psychology interventions into their treatment of these patients?





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LESSON OBJECTIVES:

WEEK ONE

THE HAPPY YOU: Humility and Self Concept

If happiness comes from within, then a positive self-concept is essential to human happiness. What is a negative self-image? Where does it stem from and how does it hamper human happiness? What is humility? Is humility similar to a negative self-image? Is humility just the right path or is it also the happy path?

Based on the research of June Price Tangney (“Humility,” Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology p. 483ff) and Dr. Abraham Twersky (Let Us Make Man, 1987) this lesson discusses the relationship of humility to happiness. What are the origins of the concept of humility? What are the psychological benefits? How do we ensure that humility does not tailspin into a negative self-concept and self-denigration? On the other hand, what is the psychology of arrogance, and what are the implications? What teachings of Judaism are relevant to the discussion of self-concept, humility, and arrogance?

WEEK TWO

JOY DESPITE LIFE’S STATIC: Patience and Optimism

Life has its hassles, stresses and hardships and this static impedes happiness. Building patience helps one cope better with these hardships, but what is patience and how does one nurture this virtue?

Based on the research of Sarah A. Schnitker and Justin T. Westbrook (“Do Good Things Come to Those Who Wait?: Patience Interventions to Improve Well-Being,” The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Positive Psychological Interventions p. 155ff), this lesson addresses the findings of Positive Psychology with regard to patience. What are empirically tested interventions, and how do they compare to Jewish principles of patience?

This lesson also explores Martin Seligman’s research regarding optimism (in his book *Learned Optimism*) and compares his findings to similar concepts in Jewish thinking. How can one eliminate worries about the future? Should we ignore our worries? Is there a way to build optimism and trust about the future?





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WEEK THREE

SAVORING THE GOOD: Gratitude

We live in an era of material abundance, yet many remain unhappy. Is it possible for material plenty to contribute to happiness? Why do people always strive to have more?

Based on the extensive research of Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (in their works, *The Psychology of Gratitude*, *Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude, Can Make You Happier*, and *Gratitude Works*), this lesson will discuss gratitude and its benefits for overall wellbeing and happiness. What are the common obstacles to enhancing gratitude? Which gratitude exercises have been shown to be most effective, and why? How is gratitude in Jewish religion and culture similar to the traditional definitions and how is it different?

WEEK FOUR

HUMAN IMPERFECTION: Self-Forgiveness and Change

If humans were perfect, happiness would come much easier. How does happiness think in the context of committing a moral wrong? What about character flaws, negative thoughts, broken resolutions? Is our conscience supposed to undermine our happiness? If not, how is that different from indifference?

Reviewing the research of Julie H. Hall and Frank D. Fincham (“Self-Forgiveness: The Stepchild of Forgiveness Research,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2005, pp. 621-637) this lesson examines the concept of self-forgiveness. What does “self-forgiveness” mean? What are the similarities and differences between self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness? How does self-forgiveness impact well-being? When is change more appropriate than forgiveness?

This lesson also explores James Prochaska’s Six Stages of Change (“Stages and Processes of Self-Change of Smoking: Toward An Integrative Model of Change,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* [1983], 51:3, 390-395) and relates it to the Jewish model of repentance.





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WEEK FIVE

UNHAPPY TIMES: Post-Traumatic Growth

While Judaism endorses perennial happiness, we cannot ignore the death of a loved one. Is happiness ever appropriate after the loss of a loved one? How can we avoid enduring, crippling unhappiness in the face of a tragedy?

Reviewing the research of Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi (in their book *Posttraumatic Growth in Clinical Practice*), this lesson examines the positive change that can be experienced as a result of a struggle with a life crisis or traumatic event. What is posttraumatic growth, and which strategies promote and support post-traumatic growth?

How is the Jewish way in death and mourning relevant to post traumatic growth? How does one infuse happiness in the presence of sorrow, and what actions can be helpful to bring the mourner back to emotional equilibrium.

WEEK SIX

TOWARD A MEANINGFUL LIFE: Spirituality, Religion and Meaning

Spirituality, religion and meaningful, purposeful living contribute to happiness. Why, and in what context might religion add joy to life? How might irreligious people gain from these findings? Is it proper to use religion as a means for happiness? Is life really about our happiness? Is happiness a religious issue?

Reviewing the research of Edward Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener (in *Happiness, Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth* p. 100ff) this lesson explores the relationship between religion, meaning, and spirituality from the perspective of Positive Psychology and from the perspective of Jewish writings.





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SELECT ENDORSEMENTS

“A proper education should include more courses like this one which takes up basic questions of morality that are important to live a successful mindful life.”



ELLEN LANGER, PhD

Professor of Psychology, Harvard University
Author of eleven books including *Mindfulness*
and *The Power of Possibility*
Cambridge, Massachusetts

“*How Happiness Thinks* brings together modern research in positive psychology and ancient Jewish wisdom. This marriage between theology and science can bring about significant positive change in individuals and communities.”



TAL BEN-SHAHAR, PhD

Professor, IDC
Lecturer, Psychology Department, Harvard University
Author of five books including *Happier* and *The Question of Happiness*
Herzliya, Israel

“For a long time, when policy makers and educators asked me to develop programs or curricula to increase well-being in various field settings, I told them that there was not enough rigorous research to support such an endeavor. The day has come, however, that we are ready to apply the findings of positive psychology to the wider world! *How Happiness Thinks* is a thoughtful, impressive effort to accomplish just that. I wish I could take this course myself!”



SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY, PhD

Professor of psychology at the University of California, Riverside
Author of *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*

“I’m grateful to Professor Pelcovitz and The Rohr Jewish Learning Institute for the gift of this essential and pioneering course on positive psychology. It will not only benefit us as individuals striving to lead a happy, creative, and joyful life, it’s teaching will also enhance our families, communities and the world we live in, as we learn new strategies to deal with stressful times.”



HARRIET LERNER, PhD

Author of eleven books including the
New York Times classic, *The Dance of Anger*

