

3 Takeaways Podcast Transcript

Lynn Thoman

(<https://www.3takeaways.com/>)

Ep 62: Live A Better Happier Post Pandemic Life: The 3 Macronutrients of Happiness with Harvard Professor Arthur Brooks

INTRO male voice Welcome to the 3 Takeaways podcast, which features short memorable conversations with the world's best thinkers, business leaders, writers, politicians, scientists, and other newsmakers. Each episode ends with the three key takeaways that person has learned over their lives and their careers. And now your host and board member of schools at Harvard, Princeton and Columbia, Lynn Thoman.

Lynn Thoman: Hi everyone, it's Lynn Thoman, welcome to another episode. Today, I'm excited to be with Arthur Brooks. He's a professor at Harvard, who teaches about happiness and building a good life. I am fascinated that Arthur has had three completely different careers. Before joining Harvard, he was the President of the American Enterprise Institute, and before that he was a musician who played the French horn as a member of the City Orchestra of Barcelona. He is the author so far of 11 books that I know of, a columnist for The Atlantic and host of the podcast The Art of Happiness. I'm excited to learn how he did three complete job changes, not pivots, but complete changes, and how we can all live a happier post-pandemic life. Arthur, welcome and thanks so much for our conversation today.

Arthur Brooks: Thank you, Lynn. It's wonderful to see you again. I'm watching you right now, you know, most people are listening to us, and it's a delight to see you again and see that you're well, and you've gotten through the coronavirus epidemic and prospered all the way through. You're fine, aren't you?

LT: Yes, and it's a pleasure to see you too, Arthur, and I look forward to seeing you in person soon.

AB: Absolutely, yeah. And the whole world in person, I hope, soon enough.

LT: Exactly. Arthur, you've changed careers dramatically every 10 or so years. People usually stress and consider themselves successful if they accomplish just one job pivot, but you did three complete job changes. How were you able to do that successfully? And for all the people re-evaluating their lives and wanting their post-pandemic life to be different and better, how can they accomplish that? Is there a process that you went through?

AB: Yeah, it's called failure, and necessity is the mother of invention. You gave the sanitized version of my bio, and I appreciate that a lot, but the truth of the matter is that there's been a lot of struggle in my career. It started with not succeeding in college, so all the way through my childhood, I was a classical musician, and all I wanted was to be the world's greatest French horn player. Is that too much to ask? That's ridiculous, of course, but that is truly, that was truly my ambition, and I didn't take studying seriously, and sure enough, I did really poorly in my first year of college and wound up on the outside of the institution at 19 having to make a living, and I did so by necessity, making my living as a professional French horn player.

AB: I did that playing chamber music, barely making my rent for a long time, and then I wound up

in the Barcelona [Spain] Symphony, which was a better living, I actually went there and chasing a girl, the hopeless dream of getting this girl who didn't speak a word of English to convince her to marry me. The French horn career didn't work out, but this is my 30th wedding anniversary this year, and we have three adult children, and so the career didn't work out, but the marriage did, which is really important. Things were going well in my music career, but once again, there was failure on the horizon, sort of a phantasm of things not going the way that I wanted them to. I found in my early 20s that instead of getting better and better as a classical musician, I was doing well, my career was going well, but I wasn't playing better; on the contrary, I was playing worse and I couldn't figure it out.

AB: I could speculate on what was going on at this point, but I found that I wasn't going to get better jobs, and was not going to progress in my career; on the contrary, I was probably going to be worse, and the writing was on the wall by my middle 20s that I was going to need to do something else, and just by sheer necessity and went back to college by correspondence. I got my degree by correspondence, which is not the typical profile of a professor at Harvard, but it worked for me. And then I jumped, figuring that I had to do something else, so I went and I got my PhD, became an economist. But once again, it was not because I wanted to leave music, it's because I didn't have any future in music. And so I did something else that I thought I could probably do, but in the process of that failure and by necessity re-engineering my own career, I learned how to do it.

AB: I learned the process of the fungible skills of understanding systems, of understanding new kinds of reward, of re-working your brain, of thinking in a different way, and being forced into that was enormously beneficial, because I spent 10 years as a professor after finishing my PhD, most of it at Syracuse University at the Maxwell School, which is a very fine school, a very fine public policy school. And during the time I thought to myself, I wonder if I changed again, if I can go run a company, a non-profit, because I'd been teaching non-profit management. And when the chief executive job of the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in Washington, came open and they offered me the job, through a series of weird events, basically the first three people they offered the job to said no, and they were desperate, and they offered me the job.

AB: And I did that for a decade, and when it was time to change again, I was really confident, I could actually... It wasn't easy, but I was confident that I could do it. Not back to an academic like I'd been before, but what I am here at Harvard, which is called a professor of practice, where I work to create bigger audiences from my ideas, being a columnist at The Atlantic, where I have hundreds of thousands of readers every week, I'm very blessed to do that, but not doing regular research, but rather doing research that harvests the incredible work of my colleagues around the country and bringing them to a mass audience. And that was then sort of a fourth incarnation of what I can do.

AB: So the bottom line for people who are listening to us is that you've got to fail, you're not going to learn, and the way to be able to change is being changed usually by force and involuntarily and through pain and even some small amount of trauma, and trying to avoid those things is a big mistake, because you'll simply not be light on your feet, you won't be able to have the repertoire and the flexibility that you're going to need later on.

LT: You now study and teach on happiness. What is happiness?

AB: Happiness is something that's misunderstood by most people. When I ask people what's happiness, they generally speaking, talk to me about a feeling, they talk about feeling a particular

way. Happiness is not a feeling. The best way to think about happiness is like a meal, and the way that you can describe a meal is to begin with through macronutrients. So if we talk about your dinner tonight, Lynn, one of the ways that we could understand how it will nourish you is by breaking it up into its three macronutrients, which should be carbohydrates, protein and fat, and you want them in the right form and you want them in the right balance so that you'll be healthy. Happiness is a blend of three basic macronutrients: They are enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaning.

AB: And so you need lots of enjoyment in your life, but you also need lots of satisfaction, which is the reward for meeting your goals and a job well done. And as important, and actually more important than anything else, is having lots of meaning in your life. But those are three different macronutrients. You need all three of them, you need them in balance, and you need them in abundance. And in so doing, you will actually create the happiness phenomenon. Given the fact that it's not a feeling, although feelings come out of those things and feelings assist those things, but given the fact that it's not a feeling, the best news is that happiness is something we can get better at, happiness is something that we can practice, and happiness is something that we can share.

LT: Can you talk about each one of those pillars, enjoyment, satisfaction, purpose, what they are, how people can achieve them?

AB: Enjoyment sounds like the most obvious, but it actually isn't. People have a tendency to mistake enjoyment with pleasure. And pleasure is a real thing, but it's an animal phenomenon, it's neurochemical in nature. It's basically like some combination of dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine in concert, where there's sort of a stew, and you do something and you feel good, that's pleasure. And pleasure is one of the ingredients of enjoyment, but enjoyment also requires elevation, it requires education, it requires refinement. And so real enjoyment, which is one of the pillars of happiness, takes pleasure that you get, but then you have to learn a little bit about how to refine it appropriately.

AB: For example, real enjoyment comes from something that you understand, like classical music, for example, or sports or reading. These are things that take refinement. They have pleasure attached to them, but they also take some refinement. You have to get better at them. That's what enjoyment is all about. And so people need a portfolio of things that give them enjoyment, and that requires that they get pleasure from those things, and you need to discern, does this give me pleasure or not? But then you need to get better at making that pleasure into enjoyment by learning about those things, by practicing those things, by getting better at those things. That's what enjoyment is all about. So I actually have a whole set of lectures I do on how to enjoy life more. It's a set of techniques, it's a set of practices, and you can get better at enjoyment, weird as that sounds.

AB: The second is satisfaction. Satisfaction is the most elusive of all the macronutrients. Like Mick Jagger sings, "I can't get no satisfaction". He actually can get satisfaction. We all can. The problem is we can't keep no satisfaction. Satisfaction is what you get when you meet your goals, you do a good job, when you want something and you finally get it. If you see a two-year-old who's reaching for French fries and you give her a French fry, she gets intense satisfaction. The problem is, she doesn't keep the satisfaction, she wants another French fry. And that's one of the big paradoxes of life. I read about the science of that. That has a neurochemical basis on why you can't keep your satisfaction. But satisfaction, being rewarded for your goals, is super important for your overall happiness. If you have no goals and/or you never meet any of your goals, you're going to be an unhappy person, is the bottom line. So you got to have good expectations about this. You can get

satisfaction, you just can't keep it, and so the result of it is, you have to manage your satisfaction differently than the world tells you to do it. And once again, this goes into the lectures that I give on the satisfaction pillar.

AB: And then on meaning. Meaning is not as obvious as it sounds either. What is meaning? Well, it's life being coherent, life having a direction, life having inherent value. All of those are different meanings of meaning per se. But when people have meaning, those are the people at the end of their lives that say, I had good days and I had bad days. I had good years and I had bad years. But overall, my life was happy. They judge that mostly on meaning. Meaning requires, paradoxically, Lynn, that you have a lot of unhappiness, because pain is one of the central ingredients of learning, and learning is one of the central ingredients in meaning. And so, paradoxically, to be a happy person, you also have to have a lot of unhappiness in your life. One of the biggest mistakes that we can make is trying to avoid unhappiness, because in so doing, we're also avoiding a big part of our happiness. This is why I teach a class at Harvard on it, because there's a lot that goes into it.

LT: So, Arthur, in the last couple of days, tell us about some moments when you were happiest. What were you doing?

AB: Happiness is... Well, certainly there was enjoyment, and the enjoyment came yesterday. I was sitting around my kitchen table with a bunch of my friends. My wife and I have a lot of friends from Spain. My wife is Spanish, we always hang out on Sundays. And we were hanging around laughing and telling stories, and there was a lot of enjoyment that went into that, because I've learned how to cultivate those times, to take them from the pleasure of eating and drinking and telling jokes to the more elevated enjoyment of talking about things that matter. So those are periods of enjoyment. Satisfaction comes because these days, I'm back in the classroom here at Harvard. A real moment of satisfaction professionally for me was that in this last week, I turned in a copy of my new book. I turned in the manuscript for my new book. It's coming out on February 15th. And that was a major goal, because a book is like... It's like a baby. Now, an ugly baby, to be sure, but it's a baby. And that's a reward for a job well done. I'm not going to count on it giving me satisfaction over and over again, but that was intensely satisfying.

AB: And meaning. Where does meaning come in? Meaning comes for me largely from the relationships in my life. Two weeks ago, we left my youngest child in college. And it was really, really bitter. I'm just absolutely bereft, but I'm so happy at the same time. And the reason is because it has a whole lot of meaning that we launched that ship into the world. And so I have to say that those are three macronutrients that have been met in three very different ways in my life, just in the past couple weeks.

LT: Let's dig into each one of those three of that. Enjoyment was your first one. Enjoyment doesn't come, or I'm assuming that you don't believe enjoyment comes from watching Netflix, let's say, all day every day. How can people increase their enjoyment?

AB: People need to increase their enjoyment first by discerning what it is that gives them an unusual amount of pleasure. And that's, by the way, something that's healthy enough that they can make it into something that they get better at. If listening to music inherently gives you pleasure, then learning a lot about music will turn it into a source of enjoyment. If you find that sitting quietly in the forest, for example, that nature gives you a lot of inherent pleasure, then learning about nature and finding ways to get out in nature more creatively and more intensively will be a major source of

your enjoyment. In other words, discern the source of your pleasure, and invest in learning more about it so that your whole person, not just the limbic system of your brain that's firing off these neurochemicals of pleasure, but rather your whole prefrontal cortex, your whole being can be present in the way that you use that pleasure, elevate it and turn it into something that makes you not less human as a pleasure machine, but more human, as an enjoyment machine.

LT: So interesting. So enjoyment is all about being active, actively seeking, building, perceiving enjoyment, and it's not passively watching TV or watching anything.

AB: Yeah. The way to think about this is that Daniel Kahneman, the Nobel Prize winner in Economics, he's actually a psychologist and Professor Emeritus at Princeton in Psychology. He talks about thinking fast and slow, which is process one, process two. Neuroscientists talk about the limbic system versus the prefrontal cortex. The limbic system is your lizard brain. It's deep, deep, and it evolved more than a million years ago. It's the part of your brain that has sensations. Feelings happen to you through your limbic system. And pleasure happens to you through your limbic system. Your prefrontal cortex, the big meaty lobes behind the forehead, those are your conscious brain. That's system two. That's where you know what you're doing, where you're fully alive as a person, where you're conscious. The key thing from going from pleasure to enjoyment is taking the sensations of pleasure and moving them into your prefrontal cortex, into your executive brain, so you know what's going on. And in so doing, you enhance those pleasures, but more importantly, where you're bringing your whole brain, your whole self, your whole being to the pleasures, you savor them in an entirely human and in an entirely conscious way.

LT: So interesting. Daniel Kahneman was a guest on 3 Takeaways. He is wonderful.

AB: He's great.

LT: Satisfaction, your second pillar of happiness. Can you talk more about that, what it involves, and how people can get more satisfaction?

AB: Satisfaction, we just touched on this a minute ago, is this idea of a reward for something. It's getting something that you want, usually at the end of a process. So you work for something and you get it. You work to be rewarded in your job, and you get a raise and a promotion. You work hard on writing an essay, it gets published in some national media. The happiness, the little burst of joy you get from that, that would be satisfaction. The good feelings that you get as a reward for your effort is basically what satisfaction is all about. And there are lots of neurochemical reasons that go into it. But the brain science to understand about why you can get it but you can't keep it is a process that neuroscientists call homeostasis.

AB: Now, homeostasis is a concept that in all biological processes that we tend to go back to equilibrium, that there's an equilibrium in your lymphatic system, in your heart rate, in your pulmonary... For example, you go to the gym and you work out on the treadmill, and your pulse is 160, you're getting good cardio exercise, and you step off the treadmill, and within five minutes, your pulse is back to 72 beats a minute or whatever it is in equilibrium. If it stayed at 160, you'd be dead within two weeks. You want homeostasis to return you back to a baseline so that you can survive. You want to get out of your baseline for particular reasons, like running away from a tiger or getting exercise or whatever. The same thing is true for your emotions. You have basic emotions that happen to you in the limbic system. Your fear, your anger, your disgust, your sadness,

your joy, your love, your interests. And they happen to you because you have an evolutionary reason to have them, so that you can react to your circumstances appropriately. But you don't want to stay in those grooves, or you won't be ready for the next circumstances. Plus, you'll be miserable. You want homeostasis to take you back to a baseline.

AB: Now, the problem is, you want homeostasis to take your fear away and your sadness away, you're glad of that, but you don't want homeostasis to take away your joy and your love and your interest in things. And the joy is the satisfaction you get for a job well done. It's the basic emotion you get in return for that. And homeostasis said, it's not going to last. It's gone, man. Why? Because you've got to be ready for the next set of circumstances. Now, the bigger problem is, this implicates a system of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is a system in the brain of reward, of desire. And we all understand, we all know enough about neuroscience these days to know that dopamine lies behind all addiction. So you supercharge the dopamine system, you get much, much better at producing it. But homeostasis is going to take it away, is going to take away the thrill you get from the shot of heroin or the alcohol, whatever it happens to be, or the joy you get from success.

AB: The problem then is, you become a success addict, just like you can become a cocaine addict. So you want that return on your investment for your job well done, and it... You don't... You can't keep the satisfaction, so you run to the next one, and you can't keep it, so you run to the next one. That's called the hedonic treadmill. Run, run, run, run, run, run, run, and there's an evil guy in the corner turning up the speed on the treadmill. And then after a few years, you're just afraid of stopping, so you stop on a treadmill, you're going to face plant off that thing, and you're not running for satisfaction and ambition anymore, you're running out of fear. That's the problem, the satisfaction conundrum that we get into. We want it, we love it, we can't keep it, and it gets harder and harder to get under the circumstances. So that's a lot of what I write about. That's what a big part of my new book coming out in February is about, is the science of satisfaction. Now, you can get off the hedonic treadmill, you can trade in the ordinary ambitions of life and do the things that actually give you more lasting satisfaction.

LT: What is the highlight reel? What are two things people can do to have greater satisfaction in their lives?

AB: Let me give you two suggestions. Suggestion number one is, never again do a bucket list. A bucket list is a misery machine. Why? Because it takes all of your attachments and it'll make you more ambitious and successful, by the way, because you'll be chasing, chasing, chasing, but it'll make you less satisfied. And the reason is because your satisfaction is like all the things that you have divided by what you want. And a bucket list, all it does is it engorges all your wants, turning them into these great big attachments, and it lowers your statistics. So number one is, create a reverse bucket list. On your birthday every year, make a list of all these desires that are haunting you, and take out five, and say, I detach myself from these desires, and watch your satisfaction rise. That's number one.

AB: Number two actually is, deflate the sources of your satisfaction. One of the things that you find if you do this on purpose, and you can own this, is that instead of going from bigger, better, bigger, better, bigger, better, better car, better house, better vacation, more success, more money, more sex partners, all the stuff that people actually put the sign posts of success and whatever success is with respect to your dopamine, go the other direction. Do the things that will actually bring you intense satisfaction specifically because they're small. I was just recently for my summer vacation this year,

instead of going bungee jumping in the Mekong Delta or some fancy thing that people would do, I walked the Camino de Santiago, the second time I've done it, which is the way, it's a slow, peaceful, silent, meditative, prayerful walk across Spain.

AB: And it's boring, Lynn, it's boring, because you're walking all day and it's painful, and you're praying all day, all day, for after day after day, and I remember one day, I was like an hour after starting in the morning, my wife and I were walking, silently walking, and we saw this flower. It's called the blue passion flower. I had never seen it before, and I couldn't believe my eyes. It was like this thing from science fiction. It turned out it's a South American flower that's been transplanted to Galicia in northern Spain, and it is like the weirdest flower. And I stared at it for 10 minutes, and part of the reason that it was intensely satisfying for me and talking about it right now is intensely satisfying for me, is because I slowed down the whole thing and I went from bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger, to smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller, smaller. So number one, reverse bucket list. Number two, stop trying to get bigger, start getting smaller.

LT: I've heard that that walk across Spain is one of the highlights of many people's lives, it sounds wonderful.

AB: It's fantastic and it's exactly not an adventure.

LT: Arthur, I would love to take more time and explore that in more depth, but we have so much more to cover. Your third pillar is purpose or meaning. Does that have to do with relationships or jobs, or what does that have to do with, and how do people increase it?

AB: Meaning is funny, because it's a pillar of happiness, but as we mentioned before, it actually requires a lot of pain. Meaning is the most nuanced of all the concepts in the happiness macronutrient profile. Meaning is something that you don't get if you're not living fully and taking risks, being really alive in your life, being completely involved in your life and letting pain occur. Suffering is a very sacred thing, it can be too much, it can become a medical problem, actually. But all lives have pain and being fully aligned for that pain, it helps you understand who you are. If I asked you, Lynn, you're a successful entrepreneur, you've had a really good career, and I say, tell me the pivotal moments that give you the meaning in your career. For sure, you're not going to say, that week I spent in Ibiza on the beach. It's going to be something difficult, like we almost went bankrupt, we got an unjust investigation by a government agency, something that really helped you to understand who you were and tested your mettle and made you appreciate the things that you had.

AB: And so the key thing to keep in mind for meaning is being fully awake and accepting the things that come to you, and always asking the following question, not, why is this happening to me? But what can I learn from this? And if that's always your question, what can I learn from this, then meaning will actually come to you, then significance will actually come to you. Another way to enhance it, of course, is to not try to do it alone. It's very important that meaning be something that you co-experience, and that means friendship, and that means romantic relationships that are cultivated and taken very seriously, and that means family, making sure that you're as present as you can possibly be in family, and that means dedicating your work to serving other people. And for me, a very important, the most important meaning part of my life is my religious faith, that's really, really critically important for me to find meaning, because that's sort of part of the relationship... That's part of being fully alive.

LT: Are there ways that people can increase their happiness with their lives by doing other specific things, like trying to enjoy the moments or thinking about gratitude for things that they're grateful for? Are there specific other things people can do?

AB: Yeah, there's a lot of ways that we can actually take the three pillars of happiness and make them all better. And we've talked about some of the basics in here, and a lot of it is pretty self-explanatory. The mistakes that people make are only paying attention and pleasure or thinking that if they finally meet their goal, they'll finally be satisfied once and for all, or trying to get rid of their unhappiness as if that will somehow bring them happiness. Those are the three big mistakes, because you've ruled out enjoyment, you've ruled out satisfaction in a meaningful way, and you've ruled out meaning. Those are the things to not do. But then there are accompanying things that you absolutely should do. You really should be paying a lot of attention to how you can learn more about the things that give you pleasure, practice the things that actually give you pleasure and get good at the things that give you pleasure, to simplify your life, to do things like the reverse bucket list.

AB: Gratitude, of course, is something else that will give you a lot more satisfaction, because gratitude makes you a lot more aware of the things that are happening in your life that actually should be bringing you satisfaction as opposed to letting them pass by. Gratitude basically makes you more cognizant, it makes you more conscious. Gratitude makes you more awake than it would be otherwise. And related to that, the first cousin of gratitude is mindfulness. It's interesting that the mindfulness stuff, I've studied a lot with and worked a lot with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and I studied meditation with his monks, his Tibetan monks in Dharamshala in his monastery, and they always talk about the unique psychological and philosophical and theological properties of mindfulness, but it's pretty simple, just actually paying attention to the current moment is important because otherwise, as Thich Nhat Hanh, the great Vietnamese Buddhist Master, says, you're just not alive right now, you're just not alive.

AB: You're alive sometime in the future, kind of, and you're alive in the past, kind of, but certainly not right now. He thinks, literally, you miss your life under the circumstances. So that's a first cousin of gratitude, the best way to become more mindful is to pay attention to becoming grateful under the circumstances, and then you can actually have more satisfaction, you'll also find more meaning. The last part about finding meaning is thinking, what am I doing today that's trying to avoid a certain set of experiences, certain things are happening all around me, and I'm spending a lot of my energy trying to avoid things.

AB: Okay, what am I doing and how can I stop doing those avoidance mechanisms? How can I stop avoiding things so very much? I'm avoiding having a difficult conversation, I'm avoiding feeling hungry, I'm avoiding, avoiding, avoiding. Stop avoiding things. Just simplify your life by not avoiding things so much. We spend three quarters of our lives avoiding bad things, and so doing, we're A, missing our lives and B, we're not going to get proper meaning from our lives under the circumstances. Just, man, just... I sound like a total hippie. Just let it happen, man.

LT: Arthur, what does research show about happiness over the arc of one's life?

AB: Happiness over the arc of one's life is a very interesting question, very deep question. Almost all of my MBA students, for example, are in their late 20s, and they think in the late 30s, they're

going to be happier because everybody's an optimist about their happiness. Most of them are like, yeah, when I'm in my late 30s, I'm going to have my act together, I'm going to be married, if I want to be married, and my career is going to be together, I'm going to have more money, my student debt's going to be paid off. Life is going to be sweet. And when they get to their late 30s, they're not happier; on the contrary, their life has more meaning, they understand themselves better, but their day-to-day happiness is lower. What you find is that most people, their day-to-day happiness falls between their 20s and their early 50s. Not a lot, it's not catastrophic, for some people it is. And by the way, your results may vary, some people are different on this too, but most people see a slight degradation in happiness.

AB: Now, David Blanchflower at Dartmouth has done the best work on this. He says this is robust to age group, to generational cohort and across borders. He's done this in developing countries, industrialized countries, the United States and the UK, over many, many years. This is the way it is, it's almost hard-wired in a way. But then in your early 50s, you turn a corner and you start to increase in happiness, and almost everybody gets happier from their early to mid-50s until their late 60s or early 70s, almost everybody has a sweet spot where they get happier, not everybody, because you can have bad luck or bad circumstances or mental illness or something, but most people get happier. And then it's all up in the air. Half the people get happier until death and the other half get unhappier until death, and it all depends on the decisions that you made earlier in life.

LT: Interesting. Americans seem to believe in happiness, while many other societies, especially Asian ones, which are less individualistic than America, believe more in family, duty and honor. How does happiness differ between societies?

AB: A lot, is the answer. And so when next time you read a newspaper article about the UN Happiness Index that ranks countries by happiness, put it down, it means nothing, it's a waste of your time. You can't compare societies and countries with respect to happiness, because people in different places define happiness differently. You're quite correct, in the United States, we define it with respect to progress and achievements. We also in the United States, more than most other countries, talk about our families when it comes to happiness and the love in our lives, whereas in Asia, people tend to define their happiness with respect to a sense of peace and equanimity. So the extent to which there is very little personal struggle, people tended to find that as a happier state, especially in East Asian societies. You see different... And you see even variation between country, you see differences between China and South Korea, for example, on this, and certainly between the United States and Europe, especially Northern Europe. You find that in Northern Europe, people define happiness with respect to contentment. There are very few Americans who define their happiness with respect to contentment. Nobody's content in America.

AB: Are you kidding me? It's like, I don't know what... It's like, I'm moving, I'm going west. Everybody's a cowboy, not everybody, but you get my point, that this doesn't mean that the Danes are right and the Americans are wrong, the Koreans are right and the Chinese are wrong. No, it just means that different groups of people define their happiness in slightly different ways, not hugely different, there are certain constants, enjoyment, satisfaction and purpose, but we define how we get those things in slightly different ways.

LT: Arthur, you have said that idealistic but unrealistic beliefs can do a lot of damage, but you are talking about romance and love, not happiness. Is happiness an unrealistic belief, a mistaken goal, and if so, what should the goal be?

AB: The goal should not be to be happy, the goal should be to be happier, that's a good goal, to be happier. And to be happier is not to be less unhappy, necessarily, unhappiness is our lot for a lot of people, and as part of the music behind our lives, but all of us can get happier. And the way that we can get happier is with basically a simple process. You've got to learn about it, you need to practice it and you need to share it, and so we shouldn't say, my goal is to be happy and to say, I want my kids to be happy. The key thing is for all of us, given the fact that probably, depending on the studies that you trust, 50% of our happiness is genetic, but we all can get happier, and the process of getting happier in and of itself is joy.

LT: Arthur, before I ask for the three takeaways you'd like to leave the audience with today, is there anything else you'd like to talk about that you haven't already mentioned?

AB: Well, there is everything when it comes to happiness, I mean, it's such an incredibly vast topic. One of the things that we haven't talked about is the development of the transcendent. There's a tendency in our modern conversations about happiness as if it were all a neurological phenomenon, and that's a very, very new way, a kind of a materialistic way of talking about a vast topic. And so the one thing that we haven't talked about that I'd like to ask people to think about is their own transcendent path, their philosophical path, even their spiritual path. This is a really important way that we can think about meaning in our life, and we can actually get beyond this notion that happiness is simply a neurological or neurotransmitter process in our brains, that in point of fact, there is something probably bigger than ourselves, and that's playing in on this as well. Especially those of us who are, shall we say, getting up there in years, I'm 57 years old, it's really, really important in living a good life to be pursuing a path where we're trying to find the metaphysical realities that lie behind the physical realities that we see every day.

LT: Arthur, what are the three takeaways you'd like to leave the audience with?

AB: The key things that I think are most important for us to remember, they come from the basic verities, and the one is that what philosophers and psychologists keep coming back to again and again and again, which is that happiness is love. So if you want the one big secret to becoming happier, you need to love more, and so that's number one is love more. The second big takeaway is that we need to think an awful lot about what the barriers are that we're putting up in our own lives to flourishing more, to becoming happier people. And the biggest one that I see over and over and over again is that a lot of people are living in ways that are not true, and so the one big thing we haven't talked about it, that each person can do to become happier, and this is a takeaway, and I can't get away from this is, stop lying. And what I recommend is that everybody who's listening to us today go the entire day tomorrow without telling one single lie, and they will find a new lease on life, because truth is one of the great underlying truths behind happiness.

AB: The third big takeaway is that you can't actually become happier unless you're giving this thing, and that's not a very profound truth, you should always give more of what you want, give more of what you want. If you want more compliments, you should give more compliments; if you want more success, you should make people more successful around you. That's a truth, it's not a cosmic truth, it's just a truth about how societies work. If you want to be happier, you need to understand and practice in your life, but most importantly, you need to teach this. So I teach it formally, and the reason I teach it is because I want to be happier. This is my secret to becoming happier is teaching happiness at literally the greatest university in the world, and that is an

incredible, incredible privilege in my life.

LT: Arthur, thank you so much, this has been wonderful.

AB: Thank you, Lynn, thank you for your important work and for sharing these ideas with people and for having a great show.

OUTRO male voice: If you enjoyed today's episode and would like to receive the show notes or get new fresh weekly episodes, be sure to sign up for our newsletter at <https://www.3takeaways.com/> or follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Note that 3Takeaways.com is with the number 3, 3 is not spelled out. See you soon at 3Takeaways.com (<https://www.3takeaways.com/>).