

Bölüm #26

What Matters in Life



Konuşmacılar

Hüseyin & Talip

İngilizce Konuşma Süresi

35 dakika

HÜSEYİNDEMİRTAŞ
İNGİLİZCE

- Hüseyin

Hello and welcome to the English Hour. Today we have a special guest. One of my colleagues and friends Talip from Boğaziçi is with me today and we will talk about something that I think is related to pretty much anyone and the topic is what matters at the end of the life. So, the question is about the end of the life but I think I will also talk about what matters in life in general. So not only at the end of the life but what matters throughout your life. So, let's get started with the main question.

Talip, what do you think are the things that matter in life?

- Talip

Alright. I think this is a very difficult question and I don't think there's a right answer to that one and it changes from one person to another. So, what is important for me may only be trivial for you.

- Hüseyin

I don't quite agree with that because I mean, OK I think there are things that matter to everyone and there are things that matter to certain people. For example, here is my question. I think, if I tell you that happiness is something that matters to anyone, would you agree?

- Talip

Yeah. It is, it is something that matters to everyone probably on this planet, but the way that people define happiness differs.

- Hüseyin

That's true.

- Talip

My definition of happiness is probably different from yours. So, what I do to be happy may not be I mean equal to the things that you do to be happy. So, there is a difference.

- Hüseyin

That's true. Then, let's talk about the general things that make people happy and then we can talk about the definitions and how different people perceive those things differently. So, for example, happiness is one thing. Relationships I think is another. People want relationships and in fact there is, there is a longitudinal study. I think it's one of the studies by Harvard University and it went on for several generations and at the end of the study, they concluded that the single most important thing for people to feel happy through their lives and feel satisfied is personal relationships and it's very striking to me. So, it mattered more than anything. It mattered more than health. It mattered more than I think, money. It mattered more than status. People cherished and valued their personal relationships more than anything at the end of their lives. Is it interesting? Do you find that surprising. Talip? What do you think?

- Talip

Yeah. It is a surprising finding but I mean, you know that relationships are really important for people. I mean humans are social beings. So, in order to be happy, we need to socialize and interact with others. I mean, we need to share our thoughts, emotions and so on. That is part of, in fact, being human. So...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

It is a surprising but not so surprising at the same time.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

But it is interesting that things that people normally value such as being wealthy, having a lot of money, I mean most people would think that that is important, because for example, it is expensive today to remain healthy. You need to eat organic food. I mean, hospitals are really expensive. I mean, having a certain level of prosperity I think is a must.

- Hüseyin

It is.

- Talip

Otherwise, it would be quite challenging for you to, I mean, you might feel happy from time to time but having this continual state of happiness depends to some extent on your, on your I mean prosperity, as well.

- Hüseyin

I agree.

- Talip

But even then, even if you're a poor person, you can be happy through your relationships. I mean...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

There are a lot of things, small things that you can enjoy in life. I mean, if that weren't so, then most of the people would have to be unhappy, because only a small minority in the world are really rich people. Right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah. Well, the minority or you could say 1 percent of the population holds more than 40 percent of the world's wealth and that's that's very striking. So, one person gets 40 pieces and then, 99 percent or 99 people get 1 piece. There is a disproportionate inequality and it's quite striking and the gap between the social classes is continuing to increase and there are for example, in the U.S. there are discussions about the middle class and how middle class is disappearing. For example, there is a wealth gap between the lower classes and the upper classes and that gap is continuing to increase and there seems to be no way that that gap would be bridged some time soon. And your remarks about wealth and personal finance are sound and I think there are several TED talks. There was one interesting TED talk about the

relationship between money and happiness and there is definitely truth to the saying that you need money. So, a certain amount of money is definitely necessary to lead a happy life as you said. You have health expenses, you have food expenses if you want to consume quality food. So, those all require financial resources and for example, if you want to go on a trip with your loved ones, if you want to buy gifts for them like material gifts, then you'll definitely need money. So, a certain amount of financial resource is definitely a must but the study shows that after you have enough money for your personal or family expenses, after a certain threshold, so for example, maybe after a million dollars or after 2 million dollars, I'm not... I'm not sure. So, I'm talking about the American context, not the Turkish one. So, the the the figures would be much lower in a Turkish context. So, after a certain threshold, the more money you have, you won't have more happiness. So, there is this low of diminishing returns. So, to a certain point you will get returns meaning you will have more happiness but at a certain threshold, the amount of money that you earn or gain will not impact your happiness tremendously. So, after that point, so the study concludes with an interesting finding. So, after that point, what makes people happy is charity, like doing charitable activities. For example, I guess it's one of the factors why a lot of billionaires have philanthropic organizations. For example, Bill Gates, he has billions of dollars. He's one of the most richest.... He is one of the richest people in the world and he has done remarkable work in in Africa. He has done a lot to fight with polio and other diseases in the African continent. He is doing a lot of work with regard to sanitation. So, he's taking a lot of responsibility for humanitarian missions and I think he derives great pleasure from this endeavor. They have Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and it's doing great work and I know a lot of people, a lot of billionaires who have such foundations doing charitable work around the world and I think after reaching a certain... certain for example, financial maturity, then doing charitable work and helping others who are less fortunate becomes more meaningful but of course if you're trying to get by, if you're trying to pay the bills, then it's of course difficult to think about helping others. So...

- Talip

But there is also another theory of happiness. They say that is also related to personality. So, every person has a fixed level of happiness. This may change after

dramatic events. For example, if you earn a lot of money suddenly, for example if you win the lottery...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Then, you'll be tremendously happybut this will only last for a period of time. After a certain time period, then you'll turn to your normal levels of happiness.

- Hüseyin

It's transient, temporary.

- Talip

Yeah and I think there are numerous research studies that advocate this finding.

- Hüseyin

Well, it's interesting. For example, a couple weeks ago the Americans have lottery. I think , I'm not sure if it's Jackpot or something else. So, they have a lottery system and one person was due to get more than a million dollars or even more. I don't quite remember the number. It was a huge figure. So, and there were a lot of news about how that money would sort of cripple that person, because there are studies showing that people who won the lottery sort of use up all their money in a matter of years, like in a couple years they go back to their initial state. And maybe their personal relationships suffer, maybe their health suffers, because you know having money is one thing, managing or knowing how to manage is another. So, you might for example, as a person you might inherit millions of dollarsbut if you don't know how to manage your money, then you will end up losing all that money, because you know, it's just like anything else in life. If you mismanage your resources, then you will lose them. What do you think?

- Talip

Yeah. I mean, obviously that man who won the lottery and then wasted all of his money, was not a really wise person. This is something different from happiness and having a fixed level of happiness.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Probably, that person was searching happiness all the time. Therefore, he spent all of his money. I mean...

- Hüseyin

That's true.

- Talip

I don't know, maybe notbut...

- Hüseyin

There is a saying that goes like this. "Happiness comes from within." So, if you search for happiness outside, if your search for happiness in material things for example, "OK. I'll buy this new house and I'll be very happy. I'll buy this new car and I'll be happy." If your happiness is not intrinsic, if it does not come from your heart and if it's... if it's bound to something material, then once you gain it, then that shiny object becomes normal. For example, you buy new house, you feel great. "Wow. I've got my dream house." You are happy for a couple weeks and then, once you become accustomed to it, it doesn't make you as happy.

- Talip

Yeah. It's very important. I mean, getting used to things. This is I think a very precious thing for humans. I mean, being able to adapt to any situation.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

But it's at the same time I mean a curse, because, even when you have I mean a great house for example as you said...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

...then you get used to it and it becomes a normal part of life. And then, you don't cherish it anymore.

- Hüseyin

Yeah. I agree. So, we talked about wealth. We talked about personal relationships. Is there anything that can matter for people in terms of happiness?

- Talip

I was going to ask another question in fact.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Since we are educators, I mean, I want to believe that anything can be learned. So, do you think one can learn to be happy?

- Hüseyin

I think one can learn to be happy and it's a mindset and this is something I like very much, so, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. So, Maslow in psychology talks about primitive needs and higher order or higher level needs. For example, if you're hungry, you don't really think about having personal relationships, because your stomach is hurting you. So, you want something to eat. If you are thirsty, you don't care about the ideals or freedom or anything. You just want water. So, there are levels of human need. So, you start with the most primitive ones and then, you go up the ladder. So, and at the top of the list, the triangle -you might call it triangle- there is self-

realization and then when you achieve that level, you are basically transcending everything and you are a happy and whole human being. So, there are levels of happiness and I think those can be taught. For example, if you know this model, you can build your happiness. You can say "Well, first I need to take care of my basic needs. For example, I need to make sure that I know how to pay my bills. I know how to feed myself." So, you first take care of those.

- Talip

Checklist?

- Hüseyin

Yeah, checkmark and then you move up to the other level, to the upper level. I'm not sure what that is. Maybe education, having a family like having a house...

- Talip

Aesthetics.



- Hüseyin

Aesthetics and so on. So, you move up the ladder and then up the top. So, at the bottom, you have more physical things but at the top, the more you go up the more abstract things become. For example, self-realization is an abstract concept. It's not concrete. You cannot hold self-realization in your hands, so it's not possible. So, self-realization is a concept, it's like fulfilling your potential. So, I think people can learn to be happy and there is a model for this and I think feelings are also about our mindsets. So, you can learn to be happy, you can learn to be more tolerant but it takes of course it takes a lot of practice. One doesn't become very patient the other day. So, I tell you principles of being very patient and the next day I cannot expect you to be very very patient. That's... that's not realistic.

- Talip

Yeah just like with everything. Yes, I mean learning takes time whatever it is that you're learning. So, that's right but at the same time it seems to be as if this ladder, I mean as you go up the ladder, it becomes more personal.

- Hüseyin

Yeah. It does.

- Talip

For example, eating or those physical needs are relevant for everybody in the world.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

However, self-realization is defined probably differently for each person. For example, the way I realize myself would be different than yours, because we have different interests. Right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Then, it really complicates the definition of happiness and self-realization at the same time, because we cannot say that I mean if you do this, you'll become happy. Right?

- Hüseyin

But there is a path. I mean, for example when you take the route of happiness, our paths might not be the same but the the the roadblocks...

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

... or the main trajectory will be very similar or at least that's what I... that's what I think. For example, we talked about wealth. We talked about personal relationships. We talked about basic needs as a means of happiness and I think there's another thing. For example, this might really relate to that personal aspect. For example, I think for me, a part of happiness is producing something useful and learning. So,

when I learn something new, for example, when I learn a new skill, when I learn a new concept, I feel happier, because it makes me a better human being. And additionally, when I do something, for example when I produce something useful, for example this podcast is something useful. So, when I record this podcast, I feel happy, because I feel that I'm helping a lot of people both here in Turkey and around the world to both learn about interesting topics and to practice and to improve their English and listening skills. So, this makes me happy. So, learning and producing helpful, useful materials is a means of happiness for me.

- Talip

Yeah. I mean, for example, for other people I mean, learning something new and I mean spending a lot of time on for example reading like you do, I mean that would be a boring activity for many people. Right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah. I mean, for some people the idea of happiness is lying around maybe in a cottage or beach.

- Talip

Or travelling or singing. I mean...

- Hüseyin

I mean, I like traveling.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

I'm not saying I don't like it. I love it. It's very interesting. It's very.. I think it's also very instructive. So, when I travel, I learn a lot of new things and it's a form of learning for me.

- Talip

Yeah. These all show then that, I mean people feel happy for different things. Right?

- Hüseyin

Okay.

- Talip

I mean... It's very personal. *****

- Hüseyin

Then, I have got this question for you. So, what are the things that make you happy Talip? Tell me about them.

- Talip

I think I mean those things...

- Hüseyin

Cheesecakes, coffee?



- Talip

... are kind of similar to yours. I mean, I like reading...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Therefore, I read a lot. I also like watching films for example. So, I'm really interested in cinema. At the same time, I fell very happy when I help people. That's why I think I've become a teacher.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Because when I teach students and when I observe their development, it makes me really really happy. I mean, the feeling that I'm helping somebody become a better person...

- Hüseyin

Or reach their goals.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

Like, happiness they have.

- Talip

This is really fulfilling.

- Hüseyin

Yeah. It is. I think that's one of the best parts of being a teacher. For example, when a friend- well, sometimes a friend or sometimes a student- when a student of mine calls me and says....

- Talip

Thank you.

- Hüseyin

I passed my exam. Thank you. My family and I, we are very happy and we appreciate what you've done so far. It's a great feeling.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

Because you basically transform someone's life and especially if that someone is someone who failed several times, you know. You know what I mean, there are

normal cases and there are extreme cases. Sometimes you work with a student who failed several times and the family, the parents and the student, they are in a low mood. They are kind of depressed and if you can help them out, that's a beautiful feeling.

- Talip

Yeah. It's great achievement at the same time.

- Hüseyin

It is.

- Talip

Not only for that student, both also for you, as well.

- Hüseyin

Sure.

- Talip

I mean, that... yeah as you said, I think that is, that is, that is the reason many people choose to become a teacher I think. It's not for the money, because you don't, you can't earn a lot really. It is because of I mean, sharing those beautiful moments. Not only success ...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Not only achievements but also sometimes failures, as well. I mean, you share the feelings of these people. You try to comfort them when they are sad.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

So, this is also a part of teaching I think.

- Hüseyin

It is.

- Talip

I've failed many times in my life but I have learned from them. Right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

So, even making someone realize that failure is not the end of the world, it is a great...

- Hüseyin

Keep searching for a new failure.

- Talip

Yeah. But I mean...

- Hüseyin

Don't be sad. You'll make another mistake. So, that's okay.

- Talip

There is a good saying. This fail... I mean, a failure is not the same as an ultimate defeat.

- Hüseyin

That's true.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

I mean you might, there is another saying, I don't quite remember. "You might, you might lose the battlebut you might win the war. " So, it happens.

- Talip

That's a great one, as well.

- Hüseyin

Like, one small defeat does not mean you are fully defeated.

- Talip

Yeah. You need to search for that ultimate defeat.

- Hüseyin

Ultimate defeat?

- Talip

Just kidding.



- Hüseyin

Well, I'd rather say the ultimate victory. Well, yeah. So, we talked about teaching and learning as a means of staying happy. Well...

- Talip

Maybe we can ask, you can ask I mean...

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

...your followers what makes them happy.

- Hüseyin

Yeah, sure. So...

- Talip

They can write their comments and at the same time practice their English.

- Hüseyin

Sure. Sure. So, everyone. So, if you're listening to this episode, make sure that you share what makes you happy in the comments. So, for example, if you're listening to this on YouTube or watching this on YouTube, share in the comments your sources of happiness. What makes you happy? It might be your little daughter. For example, I've got a little baby daughter and she makes me very happy and I guess right around one and a half years old, it's it's I guess the best times of her childhood or like infant times, I'm not so sure what to call them. So, my baby girl, she makes me happy. Teaching and learning, it makes me happy. Producing something useful makes me happy. Being able to take care of my needs makes me happy. Spending time with my family and friends makes me happy. So, these are I guess things that make me happy. So, share in the comments what makes you happy.

- Talip

Yeah. Before this I want to ask you another question. _____

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

What do you think is your greatest achievement in life?

- Hüseyin

I guess my greatest achievement in life is yet to come.

- Talip

OK.

- Hüseyin

It's a work in progress.

- Talip

OK. How about so far?

- Hüseyin

Hmm I'm not sure. I don't think I really measure things in that respect. So, it's like I like doing things that matter but I don't really measure their impact. For example, I can't.. OK. I can talk about several things but so far I think what I'm most proud of is being able to help millions of students. For example, I was recently, well, yeah, I have been checking the stats on my website and YouTube channels and it seems that if I combined the total views on across my web properties like the YouTube channel, the websites and other other sources, more than I think 8 million views have been amassed so far. So, it is.... it equals to about four million people, because generally one person views two or three pages. So, so far I think I've helped 4 million people and in total I've received more than 8 million views, page views or video views and that makes me extremely happy.

- Talip

So, you're reaching more and more people and that's why you said that you haven't yet achieved your....

- Hüseyin

Yeah. My biggest achievement has yet to come. Well, that's one of the things but for example, OK this year I'm planning or I'm hoping to help or reach 50 million people.

- Talip

Wow.

- Hüseyin

So, but this isn't just gonna be domestic. So, I'll help people in Turkey but I'm also hoping to help people abroad. So, I will be producing material, more material in English and I'll be publishing it on international platforms and as a result, I'm hoping to help students here in Turkey and I'm hoping to help students in different countries, maybe in Europe, in the Gulf, in South Asia..

- Talip

Anywhere basically.

- Hüseyin

Anywhere. So, basically not... Well, basically anywhere on earth. So, this year....

- Talip

Soon on Mars.

- Hüseyin

Not sure. I mean, if there's life or if we decide to build something on Mars, yeah, why not? But so far, my my goals are limited to the Earth and I have to limit them, you know due to certain reasons.

- Talip

Practical reasons.



- Hüseyin

Yeah, practical reasons.

- Talip

Alright. OK.

- Hüseyin

Yeah. So, OK. What is the one thing that makes you most proud or happy Talip? Let me return the question.

- Talip

Yeah. I think it is being a person who people trust.

- Hüseyin

Oh. That's beautiful.

- Talip

Yeah. I mean it is really difficult to, I mean I'm trying to be a modest person herebut at the same time...

- Hüseyin

Go for it.

- Talip

...I'm really happy that you know people people say that they like me, that I am a good person.

- Hüseyin

Good to hear.

- Talip

Yeah. It is great. I mean, every time I hear that, it feels gorgeous. Yeah.

- Hüseyin

That's beautiful. Well, what are the plans for this year for the future like for example, what is your next accomplishment?

- Talip

I think I need to start working on my Ph.D dissertation.

- Hüseyin

That makes me smile.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

I also have to work on my term papersbut I'm not sure if I'll be ever able to get to it.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

I might need a little help.

- Talip

I don't, eitherbut we need to do that. Right?

- Hüseyin

Guys, the higher you go the academic ladder, the harder things get. So, for example...

- Talip

I mean, it goes for anything in life, really.

- Hüseyin

Yeah, yeah. For example, I mean so the assignments, the projects that you complete in your B.A., in your undergrad is nothing compared to what you're expected to do in your master's or in your Ph.D. So, things get a lot tougher, the readings, the expectations, the detail. So, things get as I said a lot tougher.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

And then, you need a lot of extra grit, a lot of motivation, determination because you know, things when things get tough and there are not many people sharing your emotions...

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

Well, I guess your fellow classmates will have similar feelings to some degreebut yeah things get tough and you need some help.

- Talip

Yeah. I used to read for example, I think 100 pages every week when I was in undergraduate. Now that I'm doing my PHD. I have to read a book ever week, 500 pages and so, that...even that may not be enough.

- Hüseyin

And the thing is like this isn't like reading a novel or detective story. It's very heavy.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

It's very heavy academic material and you have to really go through dense pages to make sense out of it and it's a different experience.

- Talip

Yeah and you need to look at every sentence you read from a critical perspective.

- Hüseyin

I think we should stop complaining about our PhD...

- Talip

OK. You're right.

- Hüseyin

Or you know, our advisors might get a little unhappy.

- Talip

But we love that. Right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah. I love...

- Talip

That's why we are doing master's and PhDs.

- Hüseyin

Yeah, I mean currently I don't know if I have an advisor. I probably have one but it's not in a dissertation capacity but yeah, I guess I like my advisor and I will love my advisor.

- Talip

We are allowed to lie here, right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah, honestly, I like the people I work with. So, like for example, I think I feel honored and privileged and basically happy to be working with the people I'm working with like my friends, my colleagues, my peers, my classmates at the Ph.D. classes...

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

...and my advisors and instructors. They're all very nice people but other than being nice, they are people who know what they're talking about like, they are basically people dedicated to their field, dedicated to research and development. So, I really like that part.

- Talip

Yeah. They are I think, experts in their fields and they are really very important people in their fields, not only in Turkey but also in the world.

- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

So, you must feel I mean, privileged.

- Hüseyin

I do feel that way. Well, guys I think it's time to sum things up, wrap things up . Well, if we go back to the main discussion, the main question of today's episode, that was "What matters at the end of the life?" so, we learned that personal relationships matter more than anything else and it's backed by research but also being able to pay for your needs and maybe pursuing hobbies that that you can sustain over a long term might be alternative means of happiness. So, the idea of happiness and the idea of what matters might differ. Of course, there are individual differences but there are also a lot of similarities and there's a lot of overlap between those definitions.

- Talip

Yeah. I think you need to believe in and maybe invest in what we sometimes call "something bigger".



- Hüseyin

Yeah.

- Talip

Yeah.



- Hüseyin

That's that's a very good point. So, if you believe in something higher, something bigger, if you have a higher purpose in life I think that that keeps you energized. For example, OK, if I can find my phone, just wait a second. I'll have a look at my phone. I'll share.. I'll show you something

- Talip

We will never finish this.

- Hüseyin

OK. I'll show you something.

- Talip

This will you go on and on and on.

- Hüseyin

I just need to clean my screen, because there is something here that I'd like you to see but before I can show it to you I have to clean clean the screen. So, let's see if you can see it. OK, here on the screen. It reads 50 million people. As I said, this year I'm planning to help 50 million people and I have it on my phone, on the screen.

- Talip

As a reminder?

- Hüseyin

Yeah, as a reminder. So, like it reads 50 million people. So, whenever I log on to my phone, whenever I look at my phone I see that it's a constant reminder. Well, there are times I'm doing nothing about it but there are times that I feel "OK I've got to do something. I've got a record a new episode. I've got to write a new blog post. I've got to prepare a new book or you know, I have to do things that help people." So...

- Hüseyin

But you need to take some time off, as well.

- Hüseyin

Yeah, well. That's true, because sometimes I feel very close to burnout.

- Talip

And overwhelmed, right?

- Hüseyin

Yeah, I feel overwhelmed and I feel very close to burnout. For example, you know, I think it's important for people to know about this. For example, this is a personal story. So, this this morning we were having breakfast with Talip and I was telling him about this. For example, yesterday I felt very down. Like, there was... there wasn't a single bit of energy in my body. I felt like sleeping the whole day. I didn't want to do anything anything like I didn't want to go to class. I didn't want to do anything. I just

wanted to sleep like I didn't care like about anything, because and it's like it was close to depression and burnout, because it happens when you when you force yourself too much, like when you don't take a break. So, it's natural but as I said you have to take care of yourself so that you can avoid such situations. So, I felt very down like kind of anxious not totally depressed but I didn't feel great, like it wasn't my regular mode. But today I'm fine. I took some break. So, yesterday I took some pills and I just got some sleep and some rest. I didn't care about anything like I didn't talk to anyone.

- Talip

It has nothing to do with those pills and sleeping. It's because of me that you're feeling better today.

- Hüseyin

It might be, I'm not sure or it might be because of my little baby girl. She gave me a big smile in the morning.

- Talip

Yeah, that's a better reason.

- Hüseyin

She made me happy and Talip is trying to take ...

- Talip

Credit?

- Hüseyin

...take credit for this. Well, I mean he can partly get credit for this but I guess, he's part of the solution, not the solution itself.

- Talip

Yeah.

- Hüseyin

Well, thanks guys. That's it and as I said, please make sure that you share your comments with us and if you are listening to this on a podcast app, please make sure that you rate this podcast and you share your comments with everyone so that others can find it as well, and we really appreciate your help and we'll see you in the next episode.

