

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF BEING FABULOUS

Welcome to Module 10 Developing Self-Esteem with Nathaniel Branden

Overview

This time we do the interviewing.

It was our great honor to interview our dear friend Nathaniel Branden who is known as the Father of the Self-Esteem Movement and as one of the world-class minds of the twentieth century. He's the author of 20 books that have been published in 18 languages, selling over 4 million copies.

There could be no better person to help us understand a little more about the important topic of self-esteem.

Transcript

Jim:

Self-esteem is a major issue in almost everyone's life, from the painful absence of self-esteem to the establishing of a solid sense of self-esteem, so as to live a productive and fulfilling life.

Hi, I'm Judith Sherven and I'm Jim Sniechowski.

Judith:

We have the pleasure of interviewing Nathaniel Branden in depth this evening, after all, he's known as the father of self-esteem.

Jim:

Nathaniel is also the best-selling author of 20 books, including *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*. And his books have been published around the world in 18 languages.

Judith:

Jim and I, for those of you who don't know us, are bestselling authors and a husband and wife psychology team, and we have pioneered the study of the fear of being fabulous and how to overcome it.

Well, most success and personal achievement experts provide advice that skates along the surface. We know that only works for about 3% of those people aspiring to get past the roadblocks that block their success with goals and dreams that they hold dear.

That's why we go right into the heart of the problem.

Jim:

During this international call, we'll be asking Nathaniel Branden many questions that were sent in by those of you who are on the call. And those questions will take, take us into the private life and the self-esteem issues of Nathaniel, and of course much, much more.

So with that introduction, welcome Nathaniel.

Nathaniel:

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Jim:

We're really glad to have this opportunity to bring your genius, which we believe is a fact, your genius to the world through this particular medium of teleseminars.

We have so much to cover Nathaniel and so we're going to start off with a core question that speaks to what 54% of those who sent in questions asked about and that is self-esteem. And we'll begin by reading just a few questions that were sent in as the beginning of the conversation.

Judith:

Nathaniel. Here we want to start by saying that these are the first two that struck us to get the conversation going here.

How do I cut through all the self-sabotaging thoughts I have so I can carve a path big enough to include the person I know I am meant to be and could be if only I weren't still tied to a tree of doubt and fears. Another person writes with a very similar point of view saying I feel unable to stick to anything that will truly benefit me. Like the sentence stem completion suggested in your book, *How to Raise your Self-Esteem* I've done them, I've seen results, but now I feel blocked, ashamed, thwarted, stuck.

My question for you, this is a man writing, what do you suggest I do to dissolve this block to going after a truly satisfying life, to being able to continue to do the practices you suggest?

So our first question has to do with people who are really working hard, but they still feel blocked. What do you suggest?

Nathaniel

Well, several things occur to me of course, to answer only very, very briefly, the question rests on very complex issues, which I'm sure everyone understands.

I would say that if you only knew one thing about self-esteem and how to raise it, it could consist of taking full and total responsibility for every aspect of your life. If you would be willing to do that, to look at your life and all of its aspects, personal, social, romantic, and take full responsibility for every aspect. It is the most powerful boost I can think of for your self-esteem.

Second, irrespective of what negative voices are going on in your head, learn to practice the virtue of self-respect. And by that I mean this, do not permit yourself to make self-deprecatory statements about yourself. Do not permit yourself to make jokes at your own expense. Don't put yourself down directly or indirectly. Starve the part of you – the beast – that wants you to be cut down.

Have the courage to treat yourself with respect, ahead of feeling that level of self-respect. That requires great courage, but it's very practical. You don't wait until you feel great, so have respect and then you start reading herself with respect, just the opposite. You begin to treat yourself with respect and by doing so blow-by-blow, you can slowly begin to raise the level of yourself-esteem.

And then your perspective and all those dark thoughts that your question imply can change for the better.

Finally, here is a very simple exercise that I developed some years ago, but I have found as a psychotherapist that people who do it benefit very, very quickly. I say people who do it, who, who do it because you know people can make all sorts of promises what they'll do, but they don't do them.

So whoever is listening to my voice right now might say: well, I want to get better, I want to have self-esteem. But when it comes to doing something with any kind of self-discipline, that's where we fall short. Then there's no-thing that I can say that will make it possible for you to rise in self-esteem without developing self-discipline.

Having said all of that; I like to work a lot with sentence stems and incomplete sentences.

It works like the following: In the beginning of the morning before you begin work, and your whatever your work is, pull out a private notebook and write the following. If I focus today on what needs to be done instead of on my self-doubts ... And then as rapidly as you can, you write six endings for that stem.

Don't worry whether they're literally true or false or brilliant or not.

This is not a test. It's an exercise to help you develop something important. I'll say it again, the incomplete sentences: If I focus on what needs to be done instead of on my self-doubts ... And then you write six to 10 endings for it.

Tomorrow, you do the same thing and perhaps other endings will occur to you.

Don't look back. Don't worry if you repeat some of the things you've said before. Pound into your head day after day after day. The idea, the core idea. If I focus on what needs to be done instead of on my self-doubts, that concept gives you the leverage to change your whole life.

Judith:

And now Nathaniel, what you're saying is the development of discipline and if, if we take the root of the word discipline is disciple, which is to be a learner. And certainly a lot of people grow up in homes where they are thwarted in their ability to learn. And we agree with you that one of the key components is to be able to become a learner and to practice new ways and to even ask for help in learning new ways. So I, I agree that, that, that development of discipline and learning is crucial.

Nathaniel:

Yes. You see very often people call me, I so a lot of my psychotherapy over the telephone, and people often ask me just what this question is you're asking tonight, what do I do? But then the fact they don't put it as bluntly as this, but it amounts to that

what, how can I do to build my self-esteem without having to grow in self-discipline? Answer, you can't.

Judith:

You can't. Right.

Jim:

The action of self-discipline, first and foremost, is critical. And then the action of self-discipline is with without that nothing occurred because otherwise just wishing and wishing, you know the cliché wishing is a well that gets you nowhere.

Nathaniel, there was a second set of questions. And the, the initial questions are about self-esteem and then we're going to branch out into some of the other questions. And the reason the first questions are about self-esteem is, as I said, 54% of those who sent in questions asked about that.

So here's, here are two more questions that we'd like to put to you from two different writers.

First question, I'm interested in your self-esteem outlook, especially how one develops a healthy view of oneself having grown up in what is now commonly known as a dysfunctional family.

So why don't we just start with that one and then I'll read the second one after you respond to this one. I have to have the question one more time. Sure. This person wants to, she's interested in your self-esteem outlook, wants to know how to develop a healthy view of herself for have a healthy self-esteem, having grown up in a dysfunctional home?

Nathaniel:

Well, I don't know that my answer would be any different than it would be to the proceeding question or set of questions. Uh, practically all of us grew up in a somewhat dysfunctional home. And we all have demons that we would like to, I won't say we all but a great, many of us have demons that we need to wrestle to the ground.

So without disrespecting the fact that when the homes are really dysfunctional to a major degree, the whole battle is infinitely harder, without denying the reality of that I feel at the same time a concern with people who get lost too much in the idea of themselves as having been brought as the products of a dysfunctional family because it can become paralyzing. And it can prevent them from taking actions such as I suggested

previously because they think, wait, wait, wait, I've got to do something about the fact that, uh, I have a dysfunctional family,

But you know, many, many people who come from dysfunctional families have one edge over the person, perhaps, who asked that question.

They understand that without action nothing is going to happen. And then what has to find a way? One has to find the resources within oneself to fight more aggressively, to raise the standard of living, to raise the standard of wellbeing.

I will leave this with this final thought on this point.

Question. Are there things that you know of now that you could do and you know that if you did them, you would contribute to the strength of your self-esteem but you ain't doing them.

And can I see a show of hands, please. I know perfectly well ladies and gentlemen, I know perfectly well that this is true of almost all of us about something that we can know that if we did such and such and such and such and such and such, our health would be better. Our body would look better, our energy would be better, or our bank account could be better. But we don't do it.

We'd rather in effect suffer and moan with that favorite mantra, if only, if only, if only.

Jim:

Nathaniel, you used the term that I concur with, but I would like to hear your elaboration of it. And you say the demons that we struggle or fight with. What do you, can you elaborate on what you mean by demon or give some examples.

Nathaniel:

Certainly you can have terrible experiences when you're young. You'd be five years old, sexually molested by your mother or your father and while the other parent makes you who are five guilty and responsible for the whole transaction. So you have theses voices inside your head telling you you're nothing. You're nothing. You're bad, you're evil. What I mean by demons is dark, dark voices telling you negative things that throttle life, the throttle ambition, the throttle competence and that tend to leave a person helpless and immobile.

Judith:

Right? Exactly. And that just supports the next question here where this person writes and says, how can a person break free from the cycle of low self-esteem? My parents

suffer very low self-esteem. And after years of self-help and developing self-awareness, sometimes I feel like I shouldn't surpass them and can't be happy if they aren't. They may never figure it out. How can I establish a positive self-esteem in spite of them?

Jim:

And Nathaniel, I'd just like to add to that question because you know, you can be in an environment and an emotional or psychological environment of, of depression and despair and self-pity and particularly as a child, one sort of absorbs that. So how can you, what appears to be the nature of reality because it's the environment you've grown up in, which is debilitating you. How can one be kind of recognize that and then do something to change it?

Nathaniel:

The answer in principle look, looks like this. There's no simple formula that I can give you. I feel as though we're doing variations on a basic theme. Yes. Uh, I would say that, uh, itself aggrandizing. But I would say that reading my books would be an awfully good place to start because I give people a lot of exercises to help them cope with different kinds of problems like we've been talking about in the last few minutes.

It can't all be done in terms of a little sentence here, a little sentence there so that I feel I would rather have to at this point ask for a fresh question.

Jim:

We're going to do that because the next question is precisely that. Judith you wanted to say something?

Judith:

Well, I was just going to offer Nathaniel a perspective that, that we hold with regard to her sentence. I think this was a female thing. Sometimes I feel like I shouldn't surpass them and can't be happy if they aren't. That that's a very young way of loving your parents where you feel like you can't be different from them and you can't really ever leave home.

Nathaniel:

OK, forgive me for cutting in. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Here it goes. Listen, any parent who is worth his or her salt or has an ounce of goodness, wants you the child to do better and rise higher than they did. It's not an expression of love to resent a child who becomes more successful or more happily married than the parents.

You have to understand that what is involved here is a fight for your life and what you call your fear of disappointing or hurting your parents by becoming too happy or too successful, I would translate that to mean, I'm afraid that if I am very happy or very successful, my parents will love me anymore.

Now for you to have such a thought, it sounds like they're not acting very loving already. Yes, yes, yes. Absolutely. I'm sorry for being slow on the draw about this. Anyway, it clicked on my brain.

Judith:

But what you said is so, so critical for everyone to understand that if your parents truly love you, they want you to succeed and get ahead. If they are holding you back in some way, well then there is another agenda going on and it's really important to be conscious of that.

Nathaniel:

No one who is not the friend of your happiness is not the friend of you.

Judith:

Yay. That's a great statement. Nathaniel.

Jim:

Nathaniel, we're going to shift focus a bit.

Nathaniel:

Okay. That's very interesting. I'm delighted that I told you, don't show me the questions in advance. I want everything to be absolutely spontaneous, which it truly is. Carry on.

Jim:

Here's the shift in focus and that is the writer writes in and says, we'd like to know, we'd like to, I'd like to know a bit about your view on the state of the world today. And here's the exact question.

We as a species have evolved so quickly, technologically yet so slowly, socially. Do you see any hope when looking at the world today that mankind can survive. And if so, how? What are your feelings?

Nathaniel:

I appreciate the compliment implicit in the question. The idea that I might have anything useful or creative or productive to say on this subject is a great compliment.

I have to ask myself sometimes are we a suicidal species because our capacity for self-destruction is awesome and terrifying. And when we look at the state of the world today, it's a great call on our resources, not to feel despair.

However, I think that whether one transcends to despair and is able to hold a positive, hopeful view of the future is probably more a function of our biology and our genetics than it is of our conscious philosophical beliefs. Because some people seem to be able to, in spite of all the negativity I've referred to here, they seem to have an ability to continually reassert hope, reassert the belief that a better way of living is possible.

There is no really good known explanation among psychologists as to why some people can do this and do this and others find that as good as impossible. I think that therefore that what I say now is not an issue so much of conscious philosophical belief, as how I'm wired.

I feel like if the answer comes from my body more than anything else, that is a belief. It positive feeling about life and the unlimited potential realities of life and the fact that we will probably screw up 10,000 more times.

But I believe that the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd centuries will look better than the earlier centuries.

Jim:

A good number of years ago I was struck with this thought and that is that my immune system is essentially an on off for or against system. What comes into it, it has basically two options. Or three. One it recognizes familiarity. Two, if it recognizes that what's entered is strange it tries to absorb it into its own familiarity. Or kills it.

Those are the only three options. And when I thought about that, I thought how is it that we can, at least at this point, assume that we can reach a level as a species where we are

free from that kind of for or against, black and white, possible thinking. That's kind of thinking impossible action.

Nathaniel:

Well, it may be the case that philosophers, strangely enough, can help us, spiritual leaders of certain kinds can perhaps help us. We're learning a great deal about consciousness we didn't know, uh, decades earlier. We're learning about the evolution of consciousness and the fact that there are people alive today who are operating at a level of consciousness radically above the national average and they almost appear miraculous. But they're not there simply perhaps as a higher level of evolution. And I think that the ability to have the kind of consciousness that can contemplate the horrors of the world but not let that turn into hatred and not let it turn into hostility, but rather a relentless pursuit for sane, rational answers, does give us all hope.

Jim:

I hope this doesn't embarrass you, but, uh, we consider you one of those folks who as long as we've known you, you have been utterly dedicated to a sane, rational and actually quite inclusive and compassionate point of view and a response to the world. And, uh, and we, we rank you among those that you described.

Nathaniel:

Oh, thank you.

Jim:

You're welcome.

Judith:

On that note, we would like to invite you to help everyone listening, understand more so that they can use it themselves in their own life. And I'm going to start back in your adolescents actually and ask you to please explain to everybody what was happening in your life prior to when you were 14 years old and you read the *Fountainhead* and you reached out beyond the confines of your adolescent world and you contacted Ayn Rand. But please talk to us a bit more about what life was like for you in terms of self-esteem, in terms of the environment you were in that caused you to want to reach out.

Nathaniel:

I was living in Toronto. I was the youngest of four children. My three older siblings were all girls. Um, I was a rather a lonely adolescent. Uh, I didn't have many friends, didn't really have friends. I had people with whom I was friendly. And I led a kind of psychological, isolated life. I read a great deal. And how I came to read Ayn Rand's the *Fountainhead*, which was really the crucial turning point in my development is rather a funny story.

I was 14 years of age and I heard the voice of my oldest sister reading something from a book that actually was a passionate love scene. And um, and, and the other two girls that were, I could hear giggling, you know, and I was like this a teenage boy, 14 sitting down in a chair and not saying a word, feeling, you know, very contemptuous with these strange girls.

After they left the room, they left the book behind and I picked it up. It was the *Fountainhead* and I just began to read. And literally within two pages I felt touched by the book in the most profound spiritual way I wouldn't even begin to know how to convey. But I really felt as though a door had opened and I was entering a universe where I belonged. And that that book became, as I would later tell Ayn Rand, the chief companion of my lonely adolescence. I used to tell her, you brought me up long range many, many, many times that I read and re-read that novel.

Judith:

So she gave you a crucial element that so many people do not have, which is the sense of belonging. And, and you were able to find that in that book and certainly one element of self-esteem is that sense that you belong somewhere?

Nathaniel:

Absolutely. Although, um, although I think it's possible to have a self-esteem is strong in some respects, at least without necessarily feeling that there's this specific social group to which one belongs.

The people with whom one feels a sense of connection. Maybe imaginary fingers, but they stand for the human potential.

Judith:

Right? They stand for something you can believe in.

Nathaniel:

Exactly. Or be inspired. Be inspired by.

Jim:

But what was it about the *Fountainhead* that was so inspiring. Well, two questions. What was it that was so inspirational, inspiring, and were you aware at 14 of what it was or was it a kind of in quotes “generalized feeling”?

Nathaniel:

It was the latter. I mean, at the age of 14, I couldn't articulate any of what I'm saying now. I just thought that it was a totally different way of looking at life, looking at reality that I'd ever heard of it read before. And um, I wrote about this in some detail in my memoir, *My Years with Ayn Rand*, for anybody who was interested in that.

It was just, you know, there was this thing, you know, when the pupil is ready, the teacher comes or words to that effect. I really felt as though I was walking around hungry for something and not knowing what it was I was hungry for. And when that book lay in my lap, I thought this is it.

Judith:

So you then, at 14 sent her a letter?

Nathaniel:

No, I didn't write her a letter until I was 19.

I did write her an earlier letter, but she never answered it, so I'm not counting that. So I wrote, I wrote her at 19 and she answered briefly. But that gave me hope to write her a long letter asking philosophical questions. Actually somewhat challenging questions about both *The Fountainhead* and her earlier novel *We the Living*.

And she wrote me a very interesting long, I forget how many pages it was a long, long single space, typewritten letter. And later she told me the following that she rarely, rarely was answering fan mail because she was so busy writing *Atlas Shrugged*. But she showed my letter to her husband, Frank O'Connor, and he said, Ayn this is a letter that you should answer. This is a serious man and the questions that he asks are reasonable and legitimate wise. He deserves an answer.

So Ayn wrote me this marvelous letter which ended with her saying that she wanted to pursue these if I wanted to pursue these subjects with her further, give her my phone number and perhaps she could invite me over for an evening to talk philosophy.

Well, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

Jim:

Were you in New York at that time or Toronto?

Nathaniel:

I was at UCLA. And she was in the San Fernando Valley in Tampa Avenue. In a Notter house, a house designed by Richard Notter.

Judith:

Anyway. Well, well before we get there, I just want to point out a couple of elements that were going on that everybody can practice here, which is:

One you followed your feeling of being attracted to something and feeling right about it and you took action to ask for more, which is very hard for all of us when we're in a low self-esteem place, but we can still push ourselves to do it.

You asked for more, you reached out.

Second, even though she didn't respond the first time, you didn't let that dissuade you.

Yes, there was a Gulf of a few years there, but you sent her another letter, you asked again and this time the moment was right. Frank stepped in and bridged the Gulf and she then sent you back this wonderful, wonderful invitation. All of us can practice reaching out, asking and not taking no or silence as the final answer going after it again.

Jim:

And I would just like to add Judith, is not really being a teacher here. She's talking out of her own experience and mine as well. Asking was something that we both had to learn. And when I say that, it's almost as though it's so obvious that something, something someone should do. But we had to learn it. And not only learn it but struggle with the doing of it because of that feeling of being undeserving such that if I asked, they would never pay any attention, or if I asked, I would only be an irritation and a nuisance to them asking is really, really critical.

Judith:

And the pay-off was that you then met Ayn in Los Angeles?

Nathaniel:

Yes. I met her in Los Angeles and we very quickly became very good friends. Uh, actually the girl who was going to become Mrs. Branden — Barbara Branden, the four of us, we're like a family. We were over there at least once a week, usually on Saturday night. And we were given the privilege of reading *Atlas Shrugged* in manuscript while it was being written. We had evening talks about it, talking about philosophy. Barbara, her major was a philosophy at UCLA and mine was in psychology. And I remember that first night I arrived at eight o'clock in the evening and I ran home and we talked philosophy until 5:30 in the morning.

And that was the way it went. And I remember that very first night sitting in that living room and the thought ringing in my head was, I'm home, I'm home.

Jim:

You know, Nathaniel, I think one of the reasons I complimented you about being one of those people whose consciousness is advanced. And I really, and I don't say that to you as a compliment. I actually mean it just as a sort of description is because you have had the great fortune of having the experience of feeling at home. Because if one doesn't feel at home, then wherever you are, you're a stranger.

And to my mind, that limits the possibility of self-expression, or at least it limits the extent of self-expression whereas feeling at home is a foundation, a platform, and a comfort that allows you to say, yes, I can speak my mind.

Judith:

And given that, would you say Nathaniel, that that feeling of being at home with Ayn and the, the four of you, Barbara and Frank included, is that fostered in you the desire to get involved in politics? Start writing yourself. I mean, what we'd like to learn and, and have everyone understand is what do you attribute to in terms of your own self-esteem, the impulse to grow yourself beyond the UCLA student, into the man of international acclaim that you have achieved for many years now and still hold. How do you understand that that impulse was fueled?

Nathaniel:

Well, it begins with a funny story.

My mother saw that I had become completely obsessed with this novel. I wasn't doing my school work. I wasn't interested in anything except talking about *The Fountainhead*. And she wondered whether this was a good influence on me or a poor influence.

What happened was she knew a woman who my mother, for reasons best known to herself, but thought this woman was a real serious intellectual. So she invited her over for dinner and she asked me to explain to this woman what *The Fountainhead* was all about.

And I said to the woman, you know the best way to do that as I'll read you the courtroom speech. As I read the courtroom speech to her she said, well, that's not original. I mean, that's just anarchism. Well, I didn't know what anarchism was, but I was absolutely certain that the woman was wrong and additionally, not anarchism.

And of course I was right. It was not anarchism.

What happened is the next day I skipped school, forging a note from my mother saying my mother was sick. And I went down to the Bloor Street public library and I said to the librarian, could you please direct me to books on anarchism.

And the first book she came up with was by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell *Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism*.

And from that book I grasped three things that there was a profession called philosophy and there was a field rather political theory. I began to read more, more philosophy and quickly discovered psychology as a separate independent discipline.

All when I was 14. I skipped school so many times that I failed second form high school because I was busy down in the library reading.

My mother is going crazy predicting disaster for me. It didn't turn out that way fortunately. Then, um, the next thing was I, I had a cousin that I would be discussing philosophy with--endless hours. And my mother is going crazy. I wasn't studying, I wasn't studying, I was talking, talking, talking, philosophy, discussion and this became the family joke because she would say nobody is going to pay you for talking.

Then later on, my profession became among other things, you know, public lecturer.

And we would all joke and say, look Mom, people are paying him for talking.

Judith:

So again, if we all understand what you're saying in this wonderful charming story at you know, and well certainly I was incapable at 14 of doing what you did. We're all

capable at some age of grabbing on to some issue and becoming a learner, going to the library, whether it's now online or brick and mortar library. We're talking to people and challenging old belief that threatened to hold us back. You did it when you're 14 that is remarkable. I'm in awe.

Nathaniel:

I appreciate your compliment but I must tell you something. The explanation then prior this very simple, I was the beneficiary of my own ignorance. That is to say I did a lot of things cause it never would've occurred to me that perhaps I shouldn't.

Simply, I didn't have that category. You know, I had no idea. Well, you know, you're writing to a famous author, you know, I really didn't think of those terms. I thought to myself, well, I've got a question about your work and I really grateful if you'd give me an answer. But there was no feeling of, Oh, who am I to? I just don't think that way. It never did.

Jim:

Since Judith, for example, gave the example that many people don't do that. Even if it's a beneficiary of my own ignorance, it's a question we hadn't planned to ask.

But given what you're saying. Do you have any belief in anything that is called fate such that you started it 14 ignorant, just moving forward, sort of plotting away and yet that plotting was basically plowing the ground that would, you would stand on for the rest of your life?

Nathaniel:

No, I didn't have any feelings of fate.

Jim:

Do you now. Have you ever considered it?

Nathaniel:

Oh, sometimes. You know, as in mental exercise or fooling around, trying out one's imagination with different things such as that. But never in a serious way; no, I can't say I did.

Judith:

Okay. Well one, one more question along these lines and then we're going to move on and go back to some of the questions that were sent in. You have spent a great deal of your career writing and talking about self-esteem. What prompted you to move in that specific direction as your focus?

Nathaniel:

Well, this was another sort of odd story.

When I was 24, I was now living in New York city, working on my master's degree in psychology. And I really thought that I knew a great deal about psychology. Good deal, good deal more than what's really true.

And uh, so I, I have kind of an intellectual circle of friends who would sometimes talk to me about personal problems and I sort of became kind of an unofficial quote "therapist" to my friends.

And they were very complimentary and said nice things about me. And when I was 25, uh, working on my master's degree, I, uh, I began to get more requests to talk about problems and I think I decided then at 25 I'm going to charge something for my services.

I hope you're sitting down from what you're going to hear me saying next.

My first fee was \$10 for two hours and that is really how it began. And then I would read books and psychotherapy and I would try out different, different things by contemporary standards, I really began life as a kind of cognitive therapist and then moved on to other broader field subsequently. But I began where I would think in terms of a person is the sum total of his philosophical ideas, conscious or unconscious. And that's more of an intellectual look than I would hold today.

I believe that person's beliefs are certainly important, but they're not the only factor.

Judith:

And was your relationship with Ayn an influential in that focus on self-esteem or on the more cognitive aspect or was that not relevant?

Nathaniel:

Great to have a mind like that to talk to. It was great like that to be able to try out ideas, you know, and, and, and, and that ideas back and forth such that, uh, um, people sometimes ask, what was original with you and what came from Rand? And my first wife Barbara Branden really answered that best when she said, Nathaniel, you've

forgotten. Ayn and I both say, we had talked together so much that neither one of us could say I thought that or you thought that. Everything began to merge.

So it was very difficult for me or for Ayn, nor did we feel any particular need to.

Jim:

Well that, that's a perfect segue into the next question we wanted to ask, which is, which has to do with you and you in relationship to Ayn.

And the question is this, a writer wrote in and said the email notification for this call, the email notification that Judith and I sent out, gave Ayn Rand top billing.

I would just, I would disagree with that, but for the moment they believe I am.

Nathaniel:

Read me that sentence again.

Jim:

The email notifications for this call, gave Ayn Rand top billing. And referred to you as the longtime lover of Ayn Rand.

While that may be true, I would think having your own importance described in terms of your relationship to her would be a challenge to your own self-esteem. Do you feel that's true or how do you feel about that?

Nathaniel:

Well, this is really funny. I don't understand the question.

Jim:

I guess what he's saying is when we, when we send out the email notice for this call he, he or she, I'm not sure read it is though Ayn Rand was the star and your position in the ...

Nathaniel:

I didn't gather that impression.

Jim:

I didn't either.

Nathaniel:

You ran the copy past me and that never entered my mind. I know. I don't see that. I really don't. I don't have, I don't think that was the message conveyed.

Jim:

And I disagreed. I disagreed as well, but I thought you might've thought that, but I'm glad you didn't. That is a comment on the clarity of what we were trying to communicate

Nathaniel:

No, because I would have told you so myself you're right. Sure. Well, and

Judith:

I think perhaps then there's another question. Oh, written in, is self-esteem necessarily affected by the positive or negative opinions of others? And this may be what we're talking about here, which is that you didn't see it that way at all. It was simply a part of your history and it didn't have anything to do with your self-esteem.

Nathaniel:

Even that is not quite the way I would think about it.

Let me see if I can make this clear, briefly. Our self-esteem can be affected by our interaction, other people, but not in quite the way that we have. If we think in terms of the person like us or not or approve of us or not, are impressed by us or not. But if I think about in this way. Most of the things we want in this world at some point require the cooperation and participation of other human beings. So the ability to deal with other human beings effectively in ways that satisfied the others and satisfied yourself, is it pretty important survival skill.

Now if I, um, deal with people effectively in ways that make them feel, yeah, would it be beneficial for them to have interactions with me and it was a pleasure and I, Nathaniel, got value out of it.

That makes, that contributes to my feeling of being efficacious. And that sense, it does relate to myself-esteem, not the compliment *per se*, but my perception that I know how to deal with other human beings to bring out positives from them, to make cooperation easy, so forth.

I hope I'm being clear here.

And one last one last point. I read a book in which a psychologist talked about encouraging a student with low self-esteem, but who is good in certain subjects, to help a fellow student who is not very good in those subjects.

And the idea was the psychologist said, well, because you're doing something altruistic or a humanitarian activity, now your self-esteem will grow.

And I thought, well that's one way of looking at it, but I have a different take on that too. In order to help that fellow student, you have to be effective. And if your work helps him you get to feel effective then you are competent and that is what feeds your self-esteem.

Judith:

Yes. That you are effective and competent.

Jim:

And in that sense self-esteem it's still an inside job.

Nathaniel:

Yes, exactly.

Judith:

Well Nathaniel staying in that vein, let's shift over to love and romance for a bit. One questioner asked a variety of questions, but we'll just take a couple pieces of a, what they wrote in.

The question is how have your views on romantic love evolved since you wrote *The Psychology of Romantic Love* many years ago. And since that time, have there been any fundamental or important shifts in your understanding, definition, or appraisal? And what values do you now seek from romantic love?

Nathaniel:

I wouldn't change a word, but let me say this. As the book was published in 1980 and, uh, had a pretty good long run, but it came out of print a few years ago. About two or three months ago, I was having lunch with Jeremy Tarcher, now a personal friend, but the publisher who originally published the hardback edition of *The Psychology of Romantic Love*.

And he said to me at this luncheon, would you consider bringing out a new edition of *The Psychology of Romantic Love*?

And I said, well, why do you think there'd be a market for that? He says, yes, I do. I should, my God, in a world where 10 year olds are exchanging oral sex. Is there a market for the psychology of romantic love?

And then he stopped me with this, well, when, if not now? So right now I'm involved and doing a little bit of editing and inserting a few more thoughts and paragraphs here or there throughout the book. And I plan to finish that this fall. I'm committed to finishing that this fall.

So it's interesting that you should ask me about the addition now.

I would say, there is nothing drastic that I can think of. There's, there's one or two thoughts that I that I wish I had included, which I'm including now. For example, I'll just mention one.

I was talking in my definition of romantic love includes the idea of a strong sexual attraction and I wrote about that of course in the book, but then I realized that there was one issue I wanted to nail down, which is this. Love relationships, you have relationships go through various stages. And in most instances your sexual intensity is going to be stronger when you're in your thirties than when you're in your eighties.

It doesn't mean that that is less a romantic relationship, but you are going to likely make love less when you get older. I said that *per se* does not in any way diminish the sexual component of that romantic love because the essence is really here is not a function of how many times a week or a month you make love.

It's whether or not you preserve the vision of your partner as a sexual being. And I felt that was a very important psychological point to make, especially in a time when people are living older and older. And I, told this to a man of around almost 80 and he found that a very helpful perspective.

So I wanted to include that in the book as an example of what I mean.

Jim:

And for those of you who've never read the psychology itself, I mean *The Psychology of Romantic Love*, I would just like to read you one sentence, and Nathaniel, you know which one it is.

I have read this sentence to Nathaniel a number of times. I think it's the most beautiful sentence in the entire book. And as a matter of fact, one of the more beautiful sentences I've ever read, and it's actually in the introduction and it reads like this:

"Moved by a passion they do not understand, toward a fulfillment they seldom reach, they are haunted by the vision of a distant possibility that refuses to be extinguished."

" a distant possibility that refuses to be extinguished." And to me that last phrase, that distant possibility that refuses to be extinguished is a way of talking about hope in general romantic love attraction and the desire that we human beings have to keep moving forward because there is that distant possibility. I say it from my own life and I'm sure many people feel it and the task is to keep moving toward its fulfillment and it's very sad when it does become extinguished in some, but I love that sentence.

Okay, Nathaniel, we're going to shift focus here and several people wanted to know your opinion about evil. Evil on the world stage evil in the way people can seem to be intentionally cruel to one another, evil in the abuse that people deal out, parents deal out to children and vice versa. Where do you stand with regard to the idea of evil?

Nathaniel:

It's a very challenging question and I feel somewhat equivocal. Let's see now.

As a psychologist, I'm very much aware of the fact that everybody has a story. Example, both Adolf Hitler and Hussein Iraq were violently physically brutalized as children by their fathers

And so one can create out of those traumas a monster. And one that doesn't become a reason not to kill them. Right? But my philosophy is this, I think about it this way. If there is a mad dog with rabies running the street, it's dangerous to children in fact to anybody. You don't have to be mad at him. You don't have to think he's a bad dog to shoot him, but he needs to be extinguished because he's a danger to other people.

And so I don't find it necessary to solve the problem of whether or not some of the characters that they're in the worst stage today, whose fathers are engineers of terrorism, whether they are in some abstract sense evil or not.

What I have to know is they are killers. They kill other people and they need to be killed. I can, I can take that position without any rage or moral indignation is not

necessary. It's only necessary to know there are lines that cannot be crossed and when you cross them, you need to be extinguished.

Jim:

You know, there's a samurai principle that forbids any kind of action, any kinds of soldier action from the samurai, if the samurai does it from anger. And that's the same position.

Nathaniel:

Yes, exactly. Yeah, go ahead. I'm sorry. No, I'm just agreeing with you. I'm sorry.

Jim:

If the samurai strikes from anger, then the samurai has diminished himself in his or his own eyes as well as create a committed a crime against the person that the samurai is striking. But it's very difficult, of course.

It takes quite a lot of discipline going full circle here to maintain that kind of consciousness such that you can remain, and I don't think Nathaniel and I'd like to get your response on this, I don't think that is an emotional detachment. I think that's an emotional clarity. How would you respond to that?

Nathaniel:

I agree with that. I think of emotional clarity is a lovely way to express it. I agree with you completely.

Judith:

And Nathaniel, before we move off of this topic, another question, another related question is it appears to a lot of people that evil is increasing on the world stage. Now I can't, you know, from my perspective, I'm not sure whether that's a product of television and the Internet and that we all have tons more information than we've ever had before. Or that in fact the forces of good and evil are becoming more and more polarized. And so the extremes are becoming more visible and more dramatic. Uh, I'd like your opinion about that.

Nathaniel:

Oh, it's very interesting. You know, Alan Greenspan, the former chairman of the Fed at the time of the Enron exposure and all of the terrible things that came out at that time, was asked, Have business men become more corrupt. At least some of them than was true at earlier times.

And he said, no, it isn't that they're more corrupt, but there's so much money floating around now, it's simply that the temptation is thousands of times bigger than it's ever been.

There is so enormous sums of money floating around that the temptations to do improper things can be very powerful.

Well, the parallel I make is that I don't think that that the in fact that there are more, there are more people who are evil. So much as I think there are many more means of doing evil than at any time earlier on in history.

We have technology of a kind of undreamed power to commit evil against our fellow human being. So I, that is part of the story. But there is another element which is the following.

Today in the world there are people who are actively spreading a set of ideas which encourages what we would call evil behavior and they would call righteous behavior.

There's a massive effort to turnout suicide bombers and other sorts of hell raisers. And in that sense numerically there may be many more people today who are doing evil things in terms of violence, torture, and the like. Because for the first time that I know about, there are training camps in schools devoted in massive numbers to cultivating that particular psychology.

I hope this is responsive to what you're asking me.

Jim:

It is, and I would also sort of apply a, a perverse Andy Warhold principle of the 15 minutes of fame. You know, 50 years or 60 years ago, you might've had radical groups in the United States or in the Middle East or in China or wherever, but there wasn't an international instantaneous international stage that they could play on.

Now all they have to do is sneeze and it's heard all around the world. It seems to me that that also feeds what I think is fundamentally a personality, whose self-esteem is weak and it is a false fulfillment of some kind that eventually comes crashing down around them. But then they bring everybody down around them with them.

Judith:

Well, all right, let's shift back to you cause you're a really fascinating character.

I think Nathaniel's quite a character. I still remember Nathaniel, that we met you in Texas at a men's conference and we were invited with about 15 people to a private dinner. And, I sat across the square table. It wasn't like, you know, a little table from you and uh, I remember you were getting a new column in a magazine and we were all celebrating that moment and then something happened and now my memory is slipping a bit what the detail was. But I remember you challenged me, what was I going to follow up on something and I said, absolutely Nathaniel, you can count on it. And, and that led to having dinner with you. And of course the history has followed from that, that we became friends.

Jim:

I just also like to add that it was a men's conference and there were 10 or 12 men at that table in that meeting and Judith was the only woman. She was invited with all of those men, which made her a very proud.

Judith:

True. Yes, absolutely. Talk about self-esteem rising.

One of our, participants asked: Nathaniel, what aspect of self-esteem do you find most challenging in your own life today? Having experienced all that you have created, all that you've gone through, what do you find challenging about self-esteem? Personally, today.

Nathaniel:

I have a rather severe internal critic and I have to really work at the practice of self-accepting sometimes when I screw up in some way that really, really I feel was not worthy of me.

So I can be very, very severe and judging mistakes I've made in my life *et cetra*.

Some of the mistakes which are recorded in *My Years with Ayn Rand*. I would say that, um, that, uh, I have not always, but I have to often work at the practice of self-acceptance with regard to something I've done, which I'm not pleased about.

Judith:

I would just want to clarify for everybody listening that that is something that you still wrestle with and it doesn't matter that you are a best-selling author of 20 books that have been published in 18 languages, that you have had a wonderfully rich life with a tremendous cast of characters that still you are not inhuman, you are still all, you know, like the rest of us struggling with your particular issues and given that, what advice do you give yourself today?

Nathaniel:

I forgot to make one more confession.

I just realized that I could have talked more about *Living Consciously* with me because I do have in me a streak of the absentminded professor.

There's a story in *Living Consciously*, which I tell against myself, but for 16 years managing to spill coffee with my breakfast every morning on the kitchen floor and how I'm not going to wreck the story. I finally was educated out of that particular action.

The point is I'm pretty mindful about quote, "the big things" but sometimes I can be a little dense about the smaller things.

Judith:

Well, that's sometimes true for Jim, also. I sometimes call him the, the ditzy professor because likewise he can, he can overlook the small things cause his mind is busy with, with the big things. And, and given that, then I really appreciate your confession and, and your humanity because it's so easy for all of us to look up at somebody who is far more successful and imagine all kinds of grandiose ideas of perfection and forget that, you know, it's still a human being who's living that life. And um,

Jim:

So Judith just asked: What advice do you give yourself at this time?

Nathaniel:

Work harder at being conscious of what you need to be conscious of. Ignore the small details. Don't ignore the "small things", because sometimes the small things are the important things.

And secondly, with regard to the issue of self-acceptance, what I'm learning to do is to realize that's a realize to, to in effect dispute argue with that inner critic and say, wait on, it's really ridiculous. It's not reasonable. And sometimes I simply argue with that voice as if it were an entity. And sure enough the feeling goes away.

Judith:

You know, another question that came in was, if you are in a partnership, a romantic partnership with somebody who's having a low self-esteem issue and you're starting to feel like it's bringing you down, should you try to help that other person should you participate in trying to help them with their self-esteem?

And as I was listening to you, I was reminded that several years back when Jim and I were still living in Santa Monica and I too suffered from an internal critic.

Jim:

A fierce critic.

Judith:

But mine is, and thanks to Jim's help, reduced considerably during the 18 years we've been married, been together 19. But what I was remembering a specific thing that I had thought I had lost a favorite pair of sandals or I thought that the cleaning lady took them. I dunno what I thought about the sandals, but I couldn't find them.

And I have always been a very, very, very, very good girl and very perfect cause I was raised in a family that was very punitive when I wasn't. And I blew a hissy fit and I had my first and only actually tantrum in the kitchen.

I was jumping up and down, pounding on the kitchen counter. I was screaming. And what was Jim doing? He was laughing.

Jim:

Not at her. With her.

Judith:

With me. And I could tell he was laughing in support. And that he was in a sense encouraging me to have even a bigger hissy fit and it was so healing.

It was like ah!. Nothing catastrophic happened and I behaved terribly and he just laughed and enjoyed me and it was very helpful.

So I would just offer that into the mix of how we can help our partners if they are prone to self-criticism too, to be kind and compassionate and laugh with them.

Jim:

We have a few minutes left. We have two questions. They're both important.

Well let's just start with this one. What do you want now in your life more than anything? If in some imaginary scenario you could literally make, get any wish or dream come true, including for example, rewriting the nature of life or reality itself. What would you want now?

Nathaniel:

Well, several things. Am I allowed to have more than one wish? You've been a good boy.

I'm in a very new marriage, It's roughly two to three months ago when got married. I would like to have a long, long run in good health. So that's one thing that I want. Another thing is I want to be living with all of my faculties and everything functioning. I want to, I want to be functioning, working, or writing, thinking up to the end.

What I would not like is a long period where I'm alive, but I can't do any of the intellectually stimulating things that I do now. That's not my idea of life.

So I think in terms of health above everything else really. I wanna live a long time and I want to live it healthfully. I'll take care of the rest.

Judith:

Well, we wish that for you as well.

And, and sort of a related question is, and the final question was written in by a therapist who uses what she has learned from you, and uses your work in her therapy practice on a daily basis. She says she's eager to learn what you see as new in self-esteem. What might you offer about that?

Nathaniel:

Well, there's a very interesting book by an academic psychologist named Christopher Mruk as a book on self-esteem, just out in the third edition, *Self-Esteem: Theory and*

Practice in which he points out that until I came along, psychologists either defined or related self-esteem to competence or efficacy or else to worthiness. Confidence in worthiness or goodness. And that there are immense problems for anybody who tried to reduce self-esteem, just to competence and efficacy, or just to worthiness.

And what was radical in terms of the contribution, from my part was integrating the two and realizing that the definition of self-esteem has to embrace both and they have to be integrated. So that is something that interestingly enough, I never thought about it until I read it in the book. I never even was aware of the fact that nobody else had thought of making that connection.

And the next thing I would mention, I suppose, is it has to do with the operations of consciousness and that it all pertains to improving the quality of the relationship between consciousness and reality.



Summary of Key Points

THREE ACTIONS TO RAISE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM FROM NATHANIEL BRANDEN

1. Take full and total responsibility for every aspect of your life. It is the most powerful boost I can think of for your self-esteem.
2. Practice the virtue of self-respect. And by that I mean do not make self-deprecatory statements about yourself. Do not permit yourself to make jokes at your own expense. Don't put yourself down directly or indirectly. Starve the part of you – the beast – that wants you to be cut down.
3. Work with sentence stems and incomplete sentences on a daily basis.

Each morning write the following sentence stem.

“If I focus today on what needs to be done instead of on my self-doubts ... “
Then as rapidly as you can write six endings for the beginning or stem of that sentence. It's a practice that gives you the leverage to change your whole life.



