

Neil

Okay. Gabor, I just hit record. We are live now on three books, and thank you so much for coming on the show.

Gabor

Well, what a pleasure. Thank you.

Neil

And I've got you wedged into a tiny, like six foot by six foot room here on the 14th floor of the Penguin Random House offices. You must feel like you were getting shunted around like crazy. I'm just watching you on thousands of shows over the last few weeks. How, how is the book launch tour going for you? You must be drained.

Gabor

You know, Neil, I'm not, I'm not drained because, uh, once and you might appreciate this, when you spend a whole lot of time writing and conceiving and putting a book together, and then when you finally have a chance to talk about it, it's like all of a sudden the floodgates are open and you get to relieve all this pressure that's been built up all these years. So for me, it's a great pleasure. Not to mention, I've had great conversations with the people, the book's doing well, it's, uh, it's gonna be on the New York Times bestsellers this week. It's it's number one best bestselling book in Canada. So

Neil

I went to amazon.com. It's the number one overall book in the whole world.

Gabor

Not in the whole world, just Canada.

Neil

Oh, just Canada.

Gabor

Yeah, yeah. You know, it's, it's, yeah, you know, I wish it was like that, but not quite. But it's doing good. So what I'm saying is that buoys me, it's a pleasure. And I, you know what? When the book tour is over, I'm gonna collapse <laugh>.

Neil

Do you, do you, do you have anything you do to take care of yourself?

Gabor

Oh yeah. I swim every day. If I don't swim, you don't wanna talk to me. So I do my at least a one K or two K every morning. And so that keeps me going. And I, and I, you know, I eat well and I, I look after myself.

Neil

Wonderful. Well, I'm so grateful to you for not only coming on the show, but you, you gave a lot of thought in advance to which three books most shaped your life. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And you told me that the very first book that you can remember having a big impact on you was Winnie the Pooh. Yeah. By AA Milne. So, just for our listeners, this book was published in 1926, almost a hundred years ago, by Methuen publishing the comfort that I have. I mean, I have one of these, uh, collected, complete, complete tales. So I've got a, I've got a hard cover with a picture of Winnie, Eor and Piglet kind of ears, sniffing at a, at a pot of honey. It says The World of Winnie the Pooh right on the top. AA Milne was born in 1882 in London, died in 1956 in Sussex, UK and English author, poet, and playwright, best known of course for Winnie the Pooh. On a visit to a zoo, His son Christopher Robin, became enamored with the bear called Winnipeg.

Gabor

Actually, the zoo was in here in Canada. Winnie, there was a Canadian bear.

Neil

So they came over?

Gabor

Yeah, they visited.

Neil

Okay. And this was the inspiration for Winnie the Pooh. This book has enchanted readers of all ages for aha, almost a hundred years, with this relatable, heartwarming adventures that follow famously the friendly and lovable teddy bear as he navigates the a hundred acre wood with his friends Christopher Robin lor, Piglet, Owl and Rabbit learning the true meaning of friendship and the value of accepting everyone exactly as they are. Our Dewey Decimal fans can file this 1 8, 2 3.912 for English fiction from the early 20th century. Gabor tell us about your relationship with Winnie the Pooh.

Gabor

Well, first of all, I may have misspoken, Uh, Winnie might either have, either have been, they've seen him in Canada, or it might have been a Canadian bear in a London Zoo, I forget now which

Neil

Yeah, it's that famous book Finding Winnie where they shipped the bear off. But either way they tracked him down.

Gabor

In any case, um, well, first of all, it's a book for children that's also a book for adults. It's just so funny. It's so full of humor and, uh, these hilarious characters, you know, uh, Tigger, you know, the Tiger and Kanga, the kangaroo and, uh, Piglet, the Pooh's nervous little friend and Pooh who's the bear of little brain who's actually wiser than everybody else put together, you know? But not because he's actually a giant, but just because he's so heart connected, you know? And then of course, it's the story of a little boy growing up, Christopher Robin, who was A A Milne's actual son. And they didn't have a good relationship. In fact, um, uh, Christopher Milne, Christopher Robin in the book, Rather suspected that

these toy stuffed animals that his father was buying him were more for the creation of the book than for his own benefit. So he's written as an adult about his tough relationship with his dad.

Neil

Yes, he wrote his memoirs before becoming a book seller in, in New England. Right?

Gabor

That's right. Yeah. And, um, but nevertheless, the innocent world of childhood, all the playfulness, and for me, the final paragraph in the book is always so, so poignant, always would bring me the tears where Christopher Robin is not growing up. He has to leave his toys behind, and, uh, he's gonna go to school, Capital S, School, you know, where he's gonna learn about history and all these big things. And he gets all these animal friends together that are his toys, you know? And, uh, he says goodbye to them and him, and when he go, goes off into the woods to, to play again. And the last paragraph is, But wherever they go, wherever they go and whatever they do, a little boy and his bear will always be playing together. And that would always constrict my heart a bit, cuz it's about growing older. It's about giving up childhood innocence. It's about letting go of things that you love, you know. And so, for a long time, I was just as funny and as humorous and as engaging the book was, that last paragraph, always just brought up sadness to me. Um, which I think is universal. The, you know, you have to grow up and you have to actually face reality and you can't just play anymore, you know? But at some point, and actually it was in a psychedelic ceremony.

Neil

Ayahuaska?

Gabor

Yeah. It was ayahuaska. I realized there's nothing to be sad about cuz I'm still the bear and I'm still the little boy and I will always be playing, you know, so that, that play, we don't have to give it up. We can keep playing for the rest of our lives so we don't have to think of it as some tragic passage, you know? And that was really, um, transformative for me to recognize that, that there's something I, I thought I had to give up, but in fact I don't. So

Neil

How, how do you mean?

Gabor

Um, well, I, it had to do with a stage of healing. I was at myself. So while I still had some ways to go towards my own healing, I just experienced this last paragraph as an example of loss. But actually the last statement that there will always be playing together is not loss. It's, it's a victory. It means that no matter what happens, we can hold onto our innocent self, we can hold onto our playfulness, we can hold, hold onto our joy in the world. You would know something about that. And, and so what I thought was lost actually, once I was less hopeless in my own self, became actually a victory.

Neil

That's really beautiful. I, and I hear so much and, and how you're talking about it, that last line, you know, I think about that a lot too, because like you, I'm away from my family a lot. I'm traveling a lot. I

think about the sorrow of leaving them and the joy of coming back and you say the bear and the boy are always playing together. But I think about how do you carry love with you when you're not near people? You seem to have figured out a way.

Gabor

Well, there's an assumption in your question, which is that love is something that you carry. But what if love is actually, that's a quality that's in us. Not, not, not because we carry it consciously, but because it is part of who we are. And one, if that love actually is a manifestation of some truth in the world. I'm not trying to be airy fairy new age about it, just the older I get, I realize that, you know, love is a manifestation of the universe. So, yeah. So it's not a matter of carrying anything, it's actually carries you. So, so, um, now as, as young children, you can't connect without physical proximity. Like, infants can't hold a loving image of the parent in their hearts. Therefore, it's so cruel not to pick up kids when they're crying. It's so cruel to make them sleep on their own. Because they can't connect. They need that physical emotional connection. But as we get older, we are able to now hold that love. Even if you're talking about the love of particular people. You don't have to see your family for two years, Not that you don't, you know, in order to still love them. You know, infants can't do that. Young children have difficulty doing that. As adults, if we mature properly, we can. So on the one hand, as adults, we are capable of maintaining our relationships, even if we don't see people. On the other hand, there's this love that's bigger than any of us. That's just some manifestation of the universe. We don't carry it. We, we might manifest it or not be aware of it or be aware of it, but it's always there.

Neil

Yeah. I've been, you know, in *The Myth of Normal*, you talk so eloquently about how in the United States, 25% of women are going back to work after two weeks after childbirth. You've shared openly about your own childhood, um, how in war ravaged Hungary you as an infant were passed from your mother, was it two months of age?

Gabor

11 months.

Neil

11 months of age. And then how, how also your father was away for a year, a year and a half. Yeah. And so you're now talking a lot about attachment parenting, about keeping your children close. About keeping your kids with you. And we live in a culture where that doesn't happen. That doesn't happen. I know in my case, you know, my wife is a TDSB Toronto district school board teacher. And so with the one year mat leave offered here in Canada. Plus the school board offers more. If you wanna take more unpaid, you can. Leslie has been able to, with our children, take wonderful big chunks of time off. You've also talked about weaning kids used to historically happen at age three and four. You know, the World Health Organization, I think says age two now. But how many people do That's very, very small. How

Gabor

How many people do it two months? How many people do two months? So it's a matter of, um, the, the toxicity of the culture that I talk about in the subtitle of my new book is that it denies human needs. So, um, and human needs are not arbitrary. They're not culturally determined. They're eternal, determined

by evolution. So, you know, an elephant doesn't get to decide what their needs are. They have certain needs built into them by evolution. That's, they evolved in response to certain environment.

Neil

That's how an elephants born. All the other elephants come around and touch it with its trunk.

Gabor

Right. All the mother elephants touches his trunk. Yeah. So human beings also evolved in relationship to certain circumstances where, under which we lived for hundreds of thousands and millions and hundreds of thousands and our own species for at least hundred 50 200,000 years. And those needs didn't just come along accidentally. They were determined by revolutionary dynamics. And part of that was that the young is always held by the adults. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So you try and tell a mother baboon to put their baby down to sleep and not to pick them up when the baby is distressed, You know, telling a mother cat to ignore the child. The infant's distressed. But we tell human parents not to pick up their kids to sleep, train them. Now, you might argue, and it's plausible to say that in this society where people have to go to work, the kid crying at night to be picked up is just an interference with their life. But that's the toxicity, the culture that we build a culture based on economic, uh, imperatives not on the needs of human beings.

Neil

But we live in the culture today though, Gabor, where like when people, if people are listening to this now and they're about to have a child next week or the week after, and they have, if they're in the United States, maybe three months off, maybe six months off, if they're lucky. Yeah. And they hear you talk about it, and they agree with you, and they read the book and they agree with the book, and they hear you talk about the toxic culture and they agree with the toxic culture, but on the

Gabor

What, what are they gonna do?

Neil

How do they do, what do they do?

Gabor

Well, so it's true. We can't go back to hunter gatherer days and communal tribal days. I mean, that's not gonna happen. Um, but began recognize what we've lost. So when children act out their losses, we don't hold it against them and and punish them for it. Um, we can also, if we realize that for the child, it's a loss not to see the parent the whole day, which it is. Kids were in evolutionary sense with the parents the whole day, not just with their parents, but other supportive adults. Yeah. You know, and, and even in the world today, there are societies which are much more family oriented than say North America is today. But people are really isolated. Well, if you recognize that, then when you see the kid, at the end of the day, you really make an effort to reconnect warmly and emotionally with them. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, so that you try and compensate for what's been lost. The point of this book is not that we can restore some ancient prehistoric paradise, which if it existed, certainly beyond us at this point, but we can recognize what has been lost and compensate for it by understanding the child's needs and to meet it as best we can. So at least don't deprive the child of your company when you don't

like their behavior. Yeah. You know? Yeah. Don't like, like it's someone famous Canadian psychologist says, you know mm-hmm.

Neil

<affirmative>, you can say Jordan Peterson. It's okay.

Gabor

You can say it. <laugh>, uh, who he says in his 12 rules for life, an angry child should be made to sit by themselves until it comes back to normal. Now what's the assumption there? That anger in a young child is not normal. What world are you living in? Kids get frustrated, they get angry. Now, one of the developmental needs of children is to be able to experience all their emotions. All their emotions. And we have certain brain circuits including one for anger, for a good reason. Anger is a boundary protection. It's necessary. Yeah. When we squelch that we actually squelching the child development promoting mental disease and physical illness, including autoimmune disease, I would argue as a physician. Now we also have a circuit in our brain for play. So Winnie the Pooh really engages the play circuitry in our brain, and that's why I I was, I loved it so much, you know, But, but all of these emotions and dynamics have to be allowed to develop normally. And when we squelch it in the child, because we don't like the kids' behavior and we was trying to slot the kid into to be a denizen of society, as same author also puts it, we're putting society's expectations, um, the expectations of a fundamentally flawed culture against the child's needs.

Neil

Right.

Gabor

And then what are we doing? I mean, one of your three a's is authenticity. Yes. That's one of my four As as well. It's just we both seem to see reality. Yeah. So that authenticity, which is for God's sake, has to involve being in touch with yourself fully and being able to manifest it. You're squelching the child authenticity. Absolutely. Preparing them for a child of falsehood, for a life of falsehood. So this is not trivial stuff.

Neil

No, no, no. You've, So part of what the conversation leans towards, of course, is the relationship between the mother and the child. Attachment parenting, of course is both parents, but as we talk about a feeding and connection, so on. But you also mentioned, and it was a point I wanna just pick up on AA Milne and Christopher Robin did not necessarily have a healthy relationship. They did not. And Christopher Robin, the actual real Chris Robin, wrote a memoir about the relationship with his father being kind of a workaholic. You could call him. Yeah, Yeah. Having said that, you've also been open about your own relationship with your son. You've written this book of course, with Daniel. Yeah. And you are about 30 years my senior and I have little boys.

Gabor

Do you have to rub that in?

Neil

No, it's a compliment you are so much more wise than me.

Gabor

I'm joke, I'm joking. Please.

Neil

My question is, is one of very deep self-interest. How do you develop a strong father son relationship? What are the ingredients to the connection that you have? I mean, look, to be writing a book with your child, and I know it wasn't always easy, I've heard you talking about it. Yeah. But, but what to you are the ingredients between Dev for developing a strong father son relationship? And I'm talking to the fathers out there, but also those supporting that relationship cuz it's not easy.

Gabor

Well, actually, our, our next book, which we have a two book contract, and our next book is called Hello Again. A Fresh Start for Adult Children and their parents which is based on a workshop that we give together, including we doing at Omega in New York and October and Vancouver and November. It's been tough to work out a workable relationship with my eldest son because when I was a father, I was emotionally not available to him because being a workaholic doctor, and also I was very rough on my kids emotionally speaking. And my wife and I had a very stressed relationship. And kids are, was the therapist once said to me, Kids swim in their parents unconscious like fish in the sea. So when the home environment is, is emotionally unstable, I'm not talking about whether their parents love their kids or not. We totally devoted to our kids. But because of our own traumas that we hadn't worked out yet, there was certain ways that we showed up that was very stressful for our children. So it's taken a lot of work and, and, and sort of reconnection, which is an ongoing process, but it's gotta begin with the willingness to look at one's own role in the interaction. And I mean, I could just get on a high horse and see my son sometimes as ungrateful, you know, But I also need to ask myself, well what, what was his work? What was his relationship with me is when he was small, what formed a template of, of maybe his anger at me. You know? And I realize that I'm responsible. I was there. You know. Um, so it takes willingness to take responsibility on mutual parts. And he's, it's his responsibility now. Like, like it's true that certain things that happened or didn't happen when he was young as effective in the present, but he is the only one that could take responsibly for it. Now I can't go back and fix it. I can't fix him now. I can't fix the past. So that's on and them to take responsibility. Yeah. This stuff happened, but I'm the only one that can take responsibility for it. It also takes respect, you know? And that my son and I have in spades. I mean, I have a lot of respect for his capacity, for his intelligence, for his warmth, for his brilliance with words. And he's got respect for what I do and what I can manifest in the world. So, and quite frankly, I needed his help. I mean, I've written books before, but this one was the biggest tree that I've struck my axe into.

Neil

It is the biggest book I think you've written, right?

Gabor

Yeah. It's the biggest book I've written.

Neil

I have two of them on a pile here. And they're about, uh, six inches off the table.

Gabor

<laugh>. Exactly. Well, when you're talking about a whole society and the relationship of the individual and how the, how social culture manifests in how our cells work in our bodies. You're take you're taking on a big subject. So anyway, um, mutual respect, mutual willingness to take responsibility and when stuff happens, a willingness to examine what happened and willingness to set up structures and, uh, ways of moving forward that support the collaborative enterprise. So it took all that and also a lot of swallowing, upsets and dealing with them and then getting on with it.

Neil

It's, uh, so nice to hear you talk so openly and honestly about it, about the challenges. Cause I have challenges with my kids and about the work you've done, you invest to, you know, enrich those relationships. So thank you for being so authentic about that. Now, this, we're talking war torn Hungary when you first read *Winning the Pooh*, and that was in a translated version.

Gabor

Well, not exactly. So I, I was in war torn Hungary, um, when, as a, as a one year old. The, the second war ended when I was just a year and a quarter. So I read the book. I would've, the book would introduce to me, would've been introduced to me in postwar Hungary as, as the communist dictatorship was about to be established, which was another trip, you know, if I, I may say, you know,

Neil

So, yeah. Well, well let's keep going into that because I believe around the age of 12, some were high up on your parents' bookshelf, where the books you weren't supposed to read. Yeah. And one day you climbed up there. Yeah. And you pulled down a book called *The Scourge of the Swastika*. Yeah. A short hit, *A Short History of Nazi War Crimes* by Edward Russell, the second Barron Russell of Liverpool. This book is published in 1954 by Castle. It's got a cream cover with a large pair, pair of military knee high, black leather boots on the foreground. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you, the reader, are looking through them. And you see a gathering of cowering prisoners in black and white, title is in a large red military type font across the middle with the author's name Lord Russell of Liverpool in the bottom. Edward Russell was born in 1895 in the UK, died 1981 in the UK. He's a British soldier, lawyer, historian, and writer of noble descent. When discussing the war crimes of the Second World War, modern histories have focused on the Holocaust. While the final solution was a unique and unparalleled horror, German atrocities did not end there. The Nazis terrorized their own citizens, tortured and murdered POWs, and carried out countless executions throughout occupied Europe. Lord Russell of Liverpool was part of the legal team that brought Nazi war criminals to justice. And in this firsthand position, he published the sensational Best Selling, *The Scourge of the Swastika* in 1954, which resulted in great fame and controversy. This one is filed under 940.54 for a history slash Europe slash the military history of World War II Gabor please tell us about your relationship with *The Scourge of the Swastika*.

Gabor ([00:28:43](#)):

Well, I'd known that my family had suffered, uh, during the genocide and the Second World War that my grandparents, my mother's parents had been, he was a physician, a family physician in his fifties. They were taken to Auschwitz, killed the same day. Um, my mother and I could nearly have ended up, um, going there ourselves, but for some certain vagaries of history one might say, my father was in forced labor throughout the war. My mother didn't know if he was dead or alive. I was close when my mother gave me to a stranger in the street of Budapest, 11 month old. It was because the place we were living

at my life would've been unsustainable. So I, I knew some of that, but I, and I knew what the Nazis from certain news reels and so on, but I had no idea of the scale of it. So when I reached up, I would've been 11 years old in 55, I think, when I would've found this book on my parents' bookshelf high up above where we're not supposed to be able to reach. And I started looking at the photographs and I started reading, you know, the record of nasty crimes documented by Lord Russell, my head, just my, my world was rocked. I literally, my head started spinning and for years afterwards, every day I thought about it every day. How could this have happened? How could people do this to each other? Like, how that's become a dominant question in my life as to how we suffer and why we create suffering for other people. And that, of course, that history was very close to the history of my own family. So, um, it really made me question the nature of the world and human beings and how, again, how such things are possible, How they can be prevented. Uh, why is the world so sick? What kind of healing is required? I mean, I'm not saying I thought of all those questions immediately, but you

Neil

Could draw a line from that book to this book.

Gabor

Yeah. You could actually could. So all the, all these books, all all these thoughts and pathways opened up for me when I read that book. The first response was just for, just shock.

Neil

So you realized as a young boy, your family had experience what you call capital T trauma here. Yeah. Right. Absolutely. Um, and in the world today, there's capital T trauma all over the place. Your book today of course addresses capital T and small T trauma. Yeah. But for those experiencing capital T trauma, and we've hinted at a few things you have done, including ceremonial things. Yeah. How do you begin a healing journey? Where do you point people at? And I am curious personally, where and when, um, something like ayahuasca comes into your, uh, prescription.

Gabor

So if we understand what the word trauma means, which is not these terrible things that happened, but the wound that once sustains as a result. Cause we can never heal what happened. I mean, my parents, my grandparents will never not have been killed in Auschwitz. I will never not have been given to a stranger at age 11 months by my mother and felt a sense of abandonment that will never not have happened. But the wound, which is that therefore I don't trust the world, or therefore I think I'm not lovable, or therefore I'm afraid of intimate relationships because I'll be hurt again. Those are the wounds. That's the trauma. So the trauma's not the event. Trauma is the impact on you. So that's the first thing for people to recognize.

Neil

And you've talked about how the wound can heal over and leave a nasty scab, or it can be soft and hurt to the touch.

Gabor

Or it can heal properly. Ah, you know, so, you know, the, the traumatic, the trauma, the traumatic impact is when the wound is sore and you touch it. And that's what happens when you get triggered and look at that word trigger. It triggers a small little thing. So I'm, But, but then the response is like huge.

Why? Because there's ammunition there and there's explosive material. So when you and I get triggered, say by our spouses, we could focus on you shouldn't have triggered me and this is all your fault. Or I can say, what is the explosive charge that I'm carrying here? Yeah. And pretty much every time there's a huge upset, for example, in a relationship, pretty much every time it's an old wound being touched, that's still sensitive and unhealed, traumatic wound. Now, um, the other aspect of the wound analogy is, as you say, the scar and scar tissue is hard. It has no nerve endings. It has no feelings. So people who are traumatized will often separate from their emotions. They don't know what they feel. They separate from their bodies cuz it was too painful to be in their bodies, for example, when they were being abused. Yeah. So their mind deals with it by disconnecting and then they lose themselves. You've never met a, you've never met a one day old baby disconnected from themselves. You meet lots of adults who are disconnected from themselves. Mm. If something happened to them that maintaining the connection was too painful. So they just literally, they split themselves. Um, scar tissue also doesn't grow properly and it has not flexibility. So people traumatized to the extent that I'm traumatized, and this is certainly used to characterize me quite a bit. Stuff would happen. I would react very rigidly and very kind of predictably, reactively. I would not be responding to the present moment. I'd be reacting to an old old

Neil

You are in your early seventies. Your wife doesn't pick you up from the airport like she said she was gonna. So as a result, you are insulted or

Gabor

Yeah. Well, so when my wife doesn't show up at the airport to pick me up, as I describe in the first chapter, I react like the way I did when I was a one year old baby and reunited with my mother. And I wouldn't even look at her. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> now that not looking at her. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> is a defense.

Neil

Right. You're trying to say, I don't need you

Gabor

I don't, well I'm not gonna be so hurt again. Right. If I open to you, you are gonna hurt me again. So I'm not gonna trust again. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that makes us not trust intimate relationships or to react to hurt by withdrawing, which is my particular style is that if I'm hurt or upset is to withdraw, to get kind of rigid and cold and not wanna look at the other person. You know? Um, but that's not because anything so bad is happening in the present moment it's cause my mind or my brain is still caught in that old reactive pattern that was stamped into my nervous system when I was a year old. And that's what trauma does. So it creates what's called the journey of the past, where instead of the present moment, we are actually reacting like some past event was happening and we're still the helpless children that we were then mm-hmm. <affirmative>, which were not mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So healing involves actually getting into the present. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, which in the case of my wife not showing up at the airport Yeah. Is Oh, I'm disappointed. I like to have seen her. Well, I'll take a taxi home, I'll see her in 15 minutes. So what, you know Yeah. And not go into this cold withdrawal, uh, this, this troll.

Neil

So you're saying being aware of it is enough to knock you out of it.

Gabor

Well, you talk about awareness yourself, but if you're aware of your three year old self, or what if you're aware of your one year old self as well, you know, it is not necessarily enough, but it's necessary.

Neil

But what if you're not? What if you're not aware of it? I have not had a capital T trauma in my life that I know of. However, I do have a lot of the anger will come out or the, uh, I'll get sullen and withdrawn. These things happen. And Leslie and I have talked openly my wife about, well, what happened to me as a child? I don't know what it is.

Gabor

You wanna find out? Yeah. Gimme five minutes because, because I've seen your wonderful TEDx talk and when you described your happy childhood, I said, I don't believe this guy.

Neil

Well, let's go. I'd love to do it.

Gabor

Because then you talked about your divorce. Okay?

Neil

Yes.

Gabor

And, and, and, and what I can tell you is that which came as a big surprise to you. It seemed, it seemed it's okay to talk about this?

Neil

Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean, you talked about it publicly.

Neil

No, I wanna talk about everything.

Gabor

Yeah. Okay. So, well, first of all, why was this a big surprise to you.

Neil

Uh, why was the divorce a big surprise?

Gabor

When your wife said, I don't love you anymore? Why was that such a big surprise?

Neil

I guess cuz my life had been pretty smooth sailing until that point.

Gabor

Yeah. Can I ask you a question? Retrospectively, did you have any inkling at all that things?

Neil

Yes, of course.

Gabor

What did you do with those inklings?

Neil

Buried them. I told myself that culturally as an East Indian person, divorce was not an acceptable framework. So I said maybe all marriages have fighting and yelling and no sex.

Gabor

So you ignore them. Okay. Now, have you met a one day old baby that ignored their gut feelings?

Neil

No.

Gabor

Okay. So something happened to you in your childhood mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that, that, that let your mind and your beliefs override your gut feelings? Yes. That would No. So ever felt sad or unhappy as a kid? Of course. Who did you talk to?

Neil

Uh, nobody.

Gabor

Very good. How old are your kids?

Neil

Uh, I, four boys. 8, 6, 4, and two.

Gabor

If the six year old felt sad or unhappy, who would you want him to talk to?

Neil

I mean, thank goodness he talks to my wife.

Gabor

But who would you want him to talk to?

Neil

I would want him to talk to me.

Gabor

Or your wife, right? Yeah. No. So with his parents, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Now what if you saw...

Neil

But he's the open one. The one the older, the kid older and under. Don't open up to us as much. This

Gabor

This is a theoretical experiment here. Yeah. Okay. If you're six year old felt sad or unhappy, scared, whatever, and didn't talk to either of his parents, how would you explain that?

Neil

How would you explain why he doesn't talk to us? Well I guess he doesn't feel safe to talk to us.

Gabor

What's it like for a kid not to trust their parents?

Neil

Okay, Well then, you know, then they have a destabilization of

Gabor

What's it like for them?

Neil

Uh, lonely. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, uh, scary. Um, uh, you know, um, this lizard brain is kind of, of coming out.

Gabor

There's your happy childhood, that's all. It doesn't take some terrible tsunami or genocide or, although, you know, I'm sure that if you go back a few generations, there's plenty of big T trauma in your family as well. Historically, how can I, I'd be just, Yeah. But, but do you understand what I'm saying about your childhood? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Like if you, if you slot your child into the, and and you say, Well, how would my child experience it if they didn't feel trusting enough to talk to their parents? That was your childhood.

Neil

Why wouldn't I talk to my parents? Loving parents dotting on me, up...

Gabor

Well, again, let's go back to your child. Yeah. Let's imagine for a moment that he's not talking to his parents about how he feels. What would've had to have happened to give him that sense? Cause when he was a year old, day old, he cried when he needed help. Yeah. What happened?

Neil

At some point, the crying child is told not to cry

Gabor

Or something. Or they get the message that the parents were too stressed or too troubled. I shouldn't bother them. They're not available for me. So I don't know exactly what happened in your family, but somewhere you got that message, if you hadn't got that message, you would've gone and asked for help. In other words, you buried your gut feelings and your emotions for the sake of fitting in with the family. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, then you get married. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and you're not picking up on no clues or you're ignoring them. Yes. A straight pathway from your childhood experience. So that's all. Now, if I, if we talk more in detail, probably more stuff would emerge about stuff about your family. We don't need to go there. I'm saying, well, we've already said is enough. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you didn't have the safety to be yourself. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> not because your parents didn't do their best. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> not because they didn't love you, but cause whatever traumas they were carrying, cultural constraints that they were working under whatever stresses was happening in their lives and in their relationship. But something happened to disconnect you from that sense of safety that every child needs.

Neil

So for parents listening to this, including myself, who feel some disconnection with their own children, based on what you're saying and what we're learning as a society today with the help of your work, how do we say we're past the point of weaning and we're past the point of co-sleeping and our kids are, uh, younger or older or older Older. Now. How, how do we rebuild those bridges and reopen those communication lines?

Gabor

Well, first of all, that's an important question to ask because usually in this culture, we make the kids work to rebuild the bridge. When you apologize, I'll talk to you. So you gotta work to build a relationship with me. Now, one of the,

Neil

I do that I take away my kids' toy. If they throw it at my head, I grab it

Gabor

Oh my God. Yeah. I would suggest you read the book. I Coro God Hold onto your kids <laugh>. Okay. It's a, it's a parenting book. The brilliant work of a psychologist friend of mine. I, I just did the writing with him. So I'm not claiming personal credit, but there's some reason why the kid is behaving the way. Look at the word acting out. So what, what does that usually mean when a kid is acting out,

Neil

They're acting normal, they're acting well as you call them at the normal, but they're just, they're just being emotionally open.

Gabor

Well, what they're doing is they're portraying in behavior something they don't have in words to say in language. Cause we haven't taught them mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So in a game of charades, we are not allowed to speak. You have to act it out. Yes. Or if I landed in a country where nobody spoke my language, I had to portray hunger, I'd have to make some eating gestures. Kids are acting out their emotional needs. And that dynamics, the parenting advice in this society is to squelch the behavior. The acting odd behavior I'm saying is find out what the kid is acting out. Cuz they're acting out the emotional needs. If my kid is angry with me, it's not a question of rewarding or allowing aggressive behavior. It's a question of how we respond to it. And at least part of the response needs to be, I know my kid is so angry. Know, when do kids get angry? When they get frustrated when their needs aren't met. So in what way? Perhaps I'm not able to meet my children's needs. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, so it just call for an inquiry.

Neil

It's hard too as an adult too, because you say, I'm like, well they, you know, they whip the toy at my head. Or they're trying to get more candy or they're trying to stay up late or they're, you know, you bump up against boundaries, which,

Gabor

Oh my god, can you just see the headline in the New York Times? Uh, Young Child Wants More Candy or Young Child wants to Stay Up Later. What

Neil

What Needs are that they want?

Gabor

What a tragedy.

Neil

Exactly. That's what's, the child is crying about that. But the, the not lack not getting ice cream for dessert.

Gabor

Dessert. Well, that's okay. No. Should they necessarily, It's not a question of catering to having aid and being permissive with everything, but can we come alongside? What, what do you like when you want something and you don't get it? What happens for you when you really want something? You don't get it. How do you respond? I know how I respond.

Neil

Yeah. I Well, that'd be anger. Just flame and frustration.

Gabor

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Well can we allow them their frustration ah, without giving them the ice cream? Right. Can we say, Oh, you're really upset, you're really sad, you're really angry at that. You don't

Neil

At least acknowledge and label and articulate the emotions

Gabor ([00:43:48](#)):

Exactly. And give you some space for it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, give some space for it. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you don't have to cater to the actual kids are like addicts in that certain sense that they confuse their wants or their desires with their needs. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> if I want it, it's mostly cuz they need it, you know? But most of us adults are like that in this consumer culture. I need to get this. No, you don't. You want to get it mm-hmm. <affirmative>. But so give the child latitude to experience all their emotions. Don't make their emotions wrong. Don't cater to it necessarily. You know, you don't wanna indulge the child in unhealthy demand making, but you can certainly come alongside the frustration. Mm-hmm. You know

Neil

Does anyone make it through childhood unscathed

Gabor

In this society? Very few. Because we've gone so far away from natural parenting, you know what I mean? Children were never meant to be brought up in isolated nuclear families. They were talked about this before. They were, you know, part of a community. Other adults around aunts, uncles taking the pressure off the mom and the dad. Parents are under way too much stress these days. Way too much is expected of them, especially if you know a single parent. But even a, a nuclear couple far away from extended family, no sense of community increasing isolation, increasing loneliness in this culture. So the parenting environment is a very stressed one for all kinds of reasons. Not cause it's the parent's fault, but under stress circumstances, parents just can't provide that attuned, emotionally present, open-hearted, um, relationship that the child actually needs.

Neil

Yeah. My wife quotes some study where she says, uh, um, you know, the number of, uh, strong, positive adult relationships that a child has, it's a huge predictor of, you know, emotional regulation and success.

Gabor

That's a hundred percent true. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> scientifically proven. And that's precisely how do our evolution, human par kids were parented. Yeah. And that's what they, not that they expected consciously, but that's what their organism expects. Yeah. And in society,

Neil

Otherwise you just got your own parents. They're just two people. You don't realize what their nutty things are until you get outta the house

Gabor

<laugh>. That's right. And those parents are stressed and they're not supported, you know?

Neil

Yeah. So, uh, this has been, I I'm, I I wanna go deeper in there, you know, uh, uh, but I wanna keep moving us forward as well because we have, we also bump into a massive epic next Yeah. Which is Don Quixote by Miguel De Cervantes, if I said it properly. Yeah. I am holding a thick, I mean, I wanna say this is 942 pages thick. Absolutely. Book. It's a purple book. It looks like a, you know, a, a knight kind of, you know, in metal with a, with a sword coming out of his side, like looking up to a window with a, with a, a woman like reaching her arm out. And at the bottom of the book I has says, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature. This book was written part one in 1605, part two in 1615. Miguel De Cervantes lived in Madrid, Spain from 1547 to 1616, best known as one of the world's preeminent novelists. This book is actually often cited as the first modern novel. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. What's it about? Don Quixote has become so entrenched by reading chivalric romances that he determines to become a knight. Arming himself in the company of his faithful squire Sancho Panza. His exploits blossom in all sorts of wonderful ways. While Quixote's fancy often leads him astray, he tilts at windmills, imagines them to be giants. Sancho acquires cunning and a certain sagacity. I dunno, I might say that wrong. Sagacity. Sane madman and wise fool they roam the world together and together they have haunted readers imaginations for 400 years, Gabor, please tell us about your relationship with Don Quixote.

Gabor

So, Don Quixote is one of the great figures of literature and, and the book itself is one of the great classics along with the Eliad of Homer or Shakespeare in where mm-hmm. <affirmative>, in fact, Shakespeare and Cervantes were contemporaries. I think they died within a day of each other.

Neil

They died the same day, it says on Wikipedia.

Gabor

Okay, I saw that. Yeah. Um, and Don Quixote is this figure of both, um, ridicule and heroism. So he, he reads all these medieval romances about knight wandering knights who rescue damsels and slay dragons and free, free the oppressed and all that. And he wants to make the world right again. Mm. So he gets this old nag of a horse called Rossinante and, uh, and gives himself a totally new name, Don Quixote della Mancha. And, and this farmer neighbor, becomes, his squire, uh, he's only got a donkey. So Sancho Panza is always on a donkey. And Don Quixote is this paragonic figure with his made up armor and, and a, and a helmet that used to be a, a, a barber's bowl, you know? Yeah. But he's convinced that it's a magical helmet. So he is, he's both insane. He sees windmills, he thinks they're giants. So he attacks them book's very funny. But at the same time, he's full of heart and he really wants to end injustice in the world, and he really wants to rescue the oppressed. Mm. And to support the weak and to, um, to punish the arrogant powerful. So, um, so he is both, uh, a figure of ridicule and, you know, you just can't help but, gut wrenchingly funny. But at the same time, he is a sort of a sad figure because he, his heart is in such the right place mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and he wants to do so well by the world, you know? Yeah. So you just can't help but love him. And, and these two characters Sancho Panza and Don Quixote for all their ridiculousness, get to love each other so much. So it's one of the most beautiful relationships in, in literature. Not nothing sexual about it. They just love each other as people as much as they fight and they argue. Um, so it's just a rollicking ride of a book. Um, but you go from laughter to tears and, um, yeah. He's one of the, as I say, so he's one of the great

historical figures. Now, you might see her from me, my given history. I would be interested in, in a character that wants justice and, uh, and, and, um, wants to create the fair world and wants to protect the, the weak from the wickedly powerful and all that. You know, that would be a very strong drive of mine. And, um, we also all have a bit of a Don Quixote about us. We, we don't see reality. We, we, we see enemies where there aren't any. And, and, and, and we tilted windmills. We, we try to do the impossible, you know, So, so it's both very human and, and, and funny and, uh, poignant and very heroic at the same time.

Neil

Yeah, You know, the most popular quote from this book gets at a lot of what you said. Yeah. It is “finally from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind.” Yeah. From so little sleeping and so little re so much reading mm-hmm. <affirmative> with work, like the work you're doing Yeah. The work Johann Hari is doing. Yeah. The work, uh, um, Tristan is doing at the Center for Humane Technology, the work that Jonathan Haidt is doing, uh, at NYU on the Coddling of the American Mind and the work he's doing on social media. It seems like collectively our level of awareness is rising quickly as we read more and more. And we still have to get to bed. We still have to be able to fall asleep at night and feel content enough that we aren't, You know, I, I will tell you Gabor that I read books about AI and I read books about algorithms and I read books about social media, and I have, I have trouble falling asleep. Hmm. I, I actually feel, my wife's like, Why are you awake? I said, I've been thinking about the problems with ai.

Gabor

Have you considered not reading those books before you go to sleep?

Neil

Well, that's kind of what I wanted to ask you. Yeah. How do we balance learning with ignorance? How we balance our, taking care of ourselves with living in the world? I, I get obsessed with something in the news. I text a friend of mine, he says, I'm not watching. Yeah. I'm not interested. I'm not interested in the war in, uh, Ukraine and Russia. I say, How can you avoid this? This is a major international event. You can't put your head in the sand. He says, No, I gotta pick up my kids from daycare, and I gotta focus on that. So how do you choose to live?

Gabor

Yeah. Well, um, why do you have such small, easy to answer questions, <laugh>? Um, well look, so first of all, um, as to the awakening, people wake up when something shocks them into waking up, You know? And so increasingly the world is getting more and more shocking. I mean, everybody sees that. That's part of the reason my book is receiving their response is getting, cuz people just wanna know what's going on here. But that awakening is parallel with the darkening as well. In fact, it's parallel to it, you know, It, it, it's, it's a response to it. So some people are waking up, other people are going more deeply asleep. I mean,

Neil

Consumption of news media is at an all time low.

Gabor

Yeah. Yeah. But on the other hand, you get consumption of all kinds of trivia on social media. That's an all time life. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, look, I was reading this morning, not that I'm jealous, but Prince Harry got a 35 million British pound three book contract for what, what has he ever done? What has he ever experienced except he was born into a certain family. It's trivial stuff. It's trivial stuff. Uh, but what, what, And in this, you know, what, what clothing is Megan wearing to what particular event? What Hollywood celebrity Sleeping or not sleeping with some other Hollywood celebrity. This is what the culture feeds to people to put them to sleep. It doesn't make any difference to their lives, you know? So there is an awakening in response to the crisis, but there's also lot of unconsciousness. And as, um, I call James Baldwin, the American writer of black writer in the last chapter, who says that in this country, words are used not to wake up to sleeper, but to cover him.

Neil

Say that one more time.

Gabor

In this country, words are used not to sleep, to wake up the sleeper, but to cover him even more.

Neil

Words are not used to wake up to sleeper, but to cover him

Gabor

Yeah. To, to make his sleep even more comfortable. So that's generally the case. So that's the first point as to how to, It's a real balance in his culture because, um, your friend with the Ukraine war, Well, yeah. Let's say he got really interested in it, then what would happen. Yeah. What would he do?

Neil

Right. That's his point. You can't do anything

Gabor

About it. Yeah. So we're we, one of the aspects of the social character that's inculcated in this is this passivity that will helpless the decisions are made by big guys or big women for that matter, far away. We have nothing to do with it.

Neil

We're a microbe in the Petri dish.

Gabor

Yeah. We just, the microbe in a Petri dish. And, uh, so we are powerless in that sense of disengagement and passivity in the face of events really do matter. I mean, climate change matters. Most people would agree unless they belong to some lunatic fringe that still questions it. Um,

Neil

Or the algorithms have fed them enough stuff that it's convinced them otherwise. Like the algorithms partly deliver shocking things. And if you click it, it goes more shocking.

Gabor

They,

Neil

Uh, it may be making you radicalized against your will.

Gabor

Yeah. All that, you know, So the passivity is built into this culture. And so decisions that are really important, most of us have nothing to say about. In fact, the studies show that when the population wants something but the elite wants something else, the elite always gets their way in terms of policy decisions.

Neil

Yeah. Look at the government. You, you've said that the United States is not a democracy, it's a corporatocracy.

Gabor

I didn't say it. I was quoting, uh, other, I was reading, I was quoting Nobel Prize winning, um, economist, um, um, Paul Krugman from the New York Times. Mm-hmm. So when they see it, they say, Yeah, you're right. You know, um, what's his name? Warren Buffet once said that, of course there's a class war. It's just that it's us, the rich that is winning the war. You know, so, so that it, in most of the population there's that kind of learned helplessness. There's nothing we can do about anything. So we might as well just live our little lives. Some point people have to break out of that and say, Well, how can I find a way to gain some agency and work with others to create some meaningful change? Um, as to what keeps you up at night? Well, I would just suggest that what in you wants to be reading stuff that keeps you up at night? I mean, can't you read that in the morning instead and, and, and read some nice, pleasant story when you go to bed? You know.

Neil

Well, I can't forget these things I read in the morning either though. I, I find I, I'm troubled by the state of the world at night when I go to bed. That's what I'm trying to say. The the toxic culture you describe is one I do perceive and feel and agree with. And it's troubling to me.

Gabor

Okay. It's troubling to me too, but it doesn't keep me awake at night. So it's, see, the world is always the same, you know, there's always troubles out there. There's horrors out there, people experiencing terrible things happening to them internationally in this country, in any country, that doesn't change from day to day. You know? So the question is what's my relationship to it? And, and you talk about attitude. So lemme just ask you if you applied your own advice about attitude to what you just told me. And, and your at and your point about attitude is so well taken that it's stuff happens, but it's what attitude you take towards it that defines your response. Yeah. What advice would you give to yourself?

Neil

Well, I'm finding that I have, the advice I gave to myself in the 2010 TED Talk your quoting is you can swirl and twirl in the gloom and doom forever, or you can newly face the future with freshly sober eyes

and choose to live life with a positive attitude. I'm talking about the choice of happiness. I'm talking about the cultivating the habit of happiness. And I guess what I'm confessing to you is I just find my ability to do that is my skill at doing that is reducing as, as thing as I get older. And it should be going the other way.

Gabor

Well, yes. And so for me, it's, it's gone the other way, you know, But that's, as you kindly pointed out, I have a few decades on you.

Neil

No, it does help having, having more perspective.

Gabor

So I have a bit of a different perspective than I used to have, you know, And I would add in this book, I also have four A's as you know, and, uh, you have three, and here I got one more word versus you, but but one of the ones that you have, I wish I'd included in my book, which is awareness. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and if I, I said this before and today's not the first time that we write to write that chapter. Again, I'd put in awareness as well. But the one that's missing from yours is one that I have is acceptance. Mm. And acceptance doesn't mean that you tolerate or put up with bad stuff. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, it means that you accept that right now this is how it is. And my question for me knows what do I wish to do on it, which is where your attitude comes in. So your attitude is very close to my acceptance here. Yeah. All I'm suggesting what's missing for you there? This is my perception. I mean, I'm not no expert on you, but I'm just saying that from my perspective, what's missing for you here is the capacity to accept and then to question what to do about it. Yeah. Rather than resist. Yeah. And try and do something from a place of emotional resistance and upset. Well, and I would suggest for Neil that that's for you is that imprint of childhood trauma mm-hmm. <affirmative> that worrying about big things, that there's not much you can do about it would've been your experience as a child.

Neil

For sure. For sure. And, um, for those wondering, you know, my mom, um, was separated from her family and a very violent, uh, uh, dictatorship in, in East Africa.

Gabor

So your family's East Indian? Yes. Yeah. Well, the Indian, the people from India really underwent terrific persecution.

Neil

Yes. And the partition obviously is massive. And her dad died at a young age, and you know, these types of traumas, I'm feeling them through me. Yeah. Um, of course, because they're through my mother as well. And, uh, my dad, his mother died at, you know, at age three. Yeah. And he's almost blanketed it, you know. Yeah. So tightly, but it somehow comes through imperceptibly and honestly Gabor, the books I write are my, the way I'm trying to solve it, right. Like the, the, the pain you feel inside me and the books I write, they aren't different. The reason I'm writing a book of awesome, the reason I'm writing a two minute morning habit, the reason I'm writing a happiness equation is because I'm trying to direct my own thinking. You know,

Gabor

But you see, I would suggest that that's great and obviously a lot of people respond to it, but what you might also do is to explore the unconscious attitudes underneath all that. And rather than just trying to override them with positive thinking to really explore what that's all about and how to heal that wound in the present moment.

Neil

And what's the way to do that? Is that where we get into the ayahuasca?

Gabor

You know, I mean, I have one chapter on psychedelics in this book. Yeah. You know, and yes, it's a powerful modality and, um, in the right hands, in the right context, right. Guidance I've seen both as a health provider and, and as a recipient, how powerful psychedelic work can be. But you know, out of eight healing chapters in this book, *The Myth of Normal*, only one is on psychedelics. So there's lots of other ways as well. Uh, psychedelics you can consider it or not consider it, but it's a powerful support. But it's not essential. And it's certainly not the only thing. And even if you have strong psychedelic experiences, I can tell you personally, it doesn't mean you have transformed anything. Cause now you have to go back into your life and whatever vision or intuition or insight you've arrived at, now you have to make it work in your real life. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, you know, so it's, which is, it's not necessarily easy. So yes, psychedelics potentially powerful healing modalities, but a lot of self work guided by people that know what they're doing, you know? So I would say by all means, keep up your positive sense of, of moving forward by the things that are awesome for you, but don't be afraid, to explore what isn't awesome for you. In fact, that's essential. You know, you gotta go into that darkness.

Neil

Mm-hmm. <affirmative> going to the light and going to the darkness exploring what is awesome and what isn't awesome. In this toxic culture, uh, *The Myth of Normal* is quickly ratcheting to the top of best sellers list worldwide. It has been a treat and an honor and a privilege to spend even a few minutes talking to you, Gabor, about your three most formative books. I'm so grateful for your time. Thank you so much for coming on three books.

Gabor

What a great pleasure, Great to meet you.