

Excerpts from *EMPOWERING THE TRIBE ~ A Positive Guide to Gay and Lesbian Self-Esteem*

From chapter 1, "On Self-Esteem and the Roots of Homophobia":

Healthy self-esteem begins with the commitment to your own process, your own growth. Whatever negative, painful messages that now speak from within you are the result of internalizing the false and unkind messages you've heard, building one upon the other, since childhood. We can learn to develop an emotional immune system to counter the effects of negative societal messages. Remember: you were not born thinking yourself a loser, or a bad lover, or a terrible daughter or son. You were not born hating yourself. You were born loving yourself (and everyone around you!) Your commitment to growth is the path to getting that love back. It is the journey to recovering your self-esteem.

From chapter 12, "What A Difference A Gay Makes":

Our modern-day heroes teach us to gather our inner resources for just the kind of rigorous honesty involved in coming out, *first to ourselves*. And that's really where coming out begins: within. With a commitment to be a person *who belongs*, just as much as anyone else. Coming out is not just about words spoken to someone else. It is about first being a person who rates his commitment to honesty higher than fear, and is ready to do whatever it takes to put that notion into practice. Because coming out can't possibly be about telling others until you are able to tell yourself. Until you are clear and committed to the rightness of being who you are.

From chapter 14, "What Was I Thinking?":

If we do not feel whole and complete as individuals, then we may look to another person to complete us. In our urgency to feel complete, we push and rush our relationships, confusing what we're *ready for* with what we believe we *need*, like forcing a square peg into a round hole. As the saying goes, nature abhors a vacuum; it's human nature to want to fill the void within, and so we attempt to do just that, with alcohol, drugs, overeating, compulsive behaviors ... and with other people.

With another person, we hope to feel the oneness, the wholeness that we believe we are sorely lacking. The problem is that this puts a tremendous amount of unconscious expectation on the other person, to be all that we can't be on our own. Without his/her consent, your new partner has unknowingly been asked to soothe your wounds and fill in all your missing parts. So, instead of just being able to complement each other and add pleasure to each other's life, there's an urgent, unspoken need being imposed upon the relationship, adding tension, inevitable disappointment, and anger.

From chapter 19, "Self-Nurturance":

Students in medical school are taught a physiological fact that provides a wonderful metaphor for healthy self-care: *The first task of the heart is to pump blood to itself*. Many of us try very hard to please others. As gay people, we've been conditioned since birth to please our parents, to be the kind of children we felt they wanted. But what do we do to try and please ourselves? How do we take good care of ourselves -- physically, emotionally and spiritually? Do we think enough of ourselves, do we think we are important enough -- *worthy* enough -- to handle ourselves with care, love, and attention? "Healthy selfishness" means that you know you matter; and it's not just lip service, it's put into practice, *by you*. It means that you give yourself enough life-affirming messages in what you do, how you think, how you prioritize your own well-being. What is enough? That is determined by listening to your own needs!

