

TITLE: Josef Šálek: How to be happy even in prison | Talks21 by Karel Janeček  
MD: Nine-hour plank, Arab prison and inner freedom. ► Listen to a powerful interview with Josef Šálek on how to be calm even in the midst of chaos.

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## Josef Šálek on inner freedom, records and the way out of the comfort zone

**"My calling is to be happy and my mission is to inspire others to be happy."** These words of Josef "Joska" Šálek may sound like a cliché. But when spoken by a man who has overcome addictions, fears, health issues, a stint in prison and a nine-hour plank, they sound very different.

When I was thinking about who to invite as my first guest on the Talks 21 podcast, I had a clear idea. For me, Joska is the personification that limits are often in our heads and that even in the harshest of conditions we can maintain our freedom and joy of life. We talked about pain, challenges, how to work with our own mindfulness, but also why sometimes you just need to get going.

### The most important thing that came out of the conversation

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## Why happiness is not found outside, but within

### Karel:

Dear friends, welcome to the first episode of the Talks 21 podcast series. Every three weeks I will be inviting an extraordinary personality and my first guest is the holder of three records in the Guinness Book of World Records - Joska Šálek.

### Josef:

Hi Karel, thank you for having me. Hi and have a great day everybody.

### Karel:

Josef Šálek is a motivator and coach in the areas of healthy lifestyle, coping with stressful situations, fears and most importantly a strong mental attitude. He says himself that his

calling is to be happy and his mission is to inspire others to be happy. Pepa, that's a beautiful calling and a beautiful mission. Can you maybe tell us how you came to this, how you became the holder of three records? Because I know your journey has been a convoluted one, and I believe many viewers can find inspiration and lessons in it.

**Josef:**

I would maybe first follow up on how you introduced my calling and my mission and how I came to that. Then I'll follow up on the records.

I used to be set up that happiness was somewhere outside of me. That is, I sought it in relationships, always in the other person or in the profession, in the work and the fulfillment of it.

I was always looking for it outside of myself, and in that way I conditioned happiness. I can only be happy if I work within the circumstances around me that are ideal.

And it didn't work in the long run. I was always unhappy because - as I say - it didn't work.

And I understood one thing: that I had to take responsibility for the fact that feeling happy is an inner feeling that we can initiate in some way. It doesn't have to be conditioned by an ideal condition. After this realization, I started to be really internally happy.

Subsequently, as I began to be internally happy with myself, I began to attract more pleasant circumstances and began to live and breathe much better in such a life.

I realised that my calling and what I should be doing was to look after my happiness, to take personal responsibility for it - and to show it to others in this way. That it is possible. That even when circumstances happen to us that aren't exactly rosy, we can still be happy if we choose to do something about it. So that's how I've come to that point.

## How to take responsibility for your life

**Karel:**

Those are beautiful words. I would maybe emphasize one thing there - that Pep's journey was extremely difficult. Maybe you can tell us something about how you were actually arrested by mistake, how you were in prison somewhere in the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia. That's absolutely crazy. So what Pepa is saying is not a theoretical point of view, but his personal experience, which has a lot of weight for me.

**Josef:**

So, of course, the journey started with my birth. And the circumstances were on the one hand favourable, and on the other hand not - how do you say. I grew up in an incomplete family, raised by my mother and my grandmother, who not only took care of me, but you could say spoiled me. So I didn't have that much of a need to be able to get help when I needed it.

I was always relying on someone to do it for me. And I literally got to the point of emotional attachments and dependencies, mostly on women. I was kind of a victim in relationships. On the one hand, I was trying to save the relationship, but on the other hand, I wasn't a support system for the women in it.

I struggled a lot, I didn't have enough self-esteem, I had a lot of fears, addictions. I compensated in different ways - so very early on I started to tend to alcohol, to overeat. I was compensating for the lack of being able to appreciate myself in other ways, for example

by overeating. I smoked. I just lived a very, very unhealthy life. And to tell you the truth, I wasn't happy in that life at all. It was more like I was playing at it.

**Karel:**

You styled yourself as a victim for so long, until life showed you what it was really like to be a victim of circumstance.

**Josef:**

Well, it's true. At first, when I reached the stage of the first turning point and realized that it was about me, not about the others, I really had to take responsibility for my life myself. My health, by the way. For how I feel about this life, how I'm going to live it, not just survive it. That was the first phase when I started to deal with personal development. And the very act of changing my mindset helped me. It's difficult at first because it's easier to live a life where we give that responsibility to others. Doctors will cure me, the system will provide for me, my partner and family will make me happy...

**Karel:**

... which I think is the biggest problem today.

**Josef:**

It's not easy to get out of such a system and take responsibility into your own hands, to stand on your own feet. I didn't know how to do that. But the change of thinking woke me up to a new life. I started to build new habits and gradually I really started to rely on myself. By being able to listen to others, I soon developed a clientele of people who were interested in my opinions. This gradually led to various therapies, because I was very empathetic and could discern the problem in others. Usually we see it in others before we see it in ourselves. And through this process I was also learning about my own problems. When I was just debating with others, I gradually began to replace my fears and addictions with what I call challenge. I began to face them, to overcome them, and to see how that moved me. I started doing different events to deal with fears, stressful situations, workshops, live events - and that gradually got me to a level where I started to have more and more confidence and self-esteem.

## Why discomfort is the foundation of mental and physical resilience

**Josef:**

But then, as you indicated, I was tested by another test. I like to travel with people to different destinations where I feel that it's nice, besides our beautiful country. And one of them is Sri Lanka. Well, most of the time, when you fly there, you change planes in the United Arab Emirates, in Dubai.

This was also the case in 2019 in December. When I was connecting to the second flight, I was assessed as a person wanted by the police there.

I had no idea what was going on. However, a gunman came and arrested me straight away. First at the airport. Then I contacted the embassy and they said, "You are a wanted person and they will try you here."

I didn't know why, but it just started happening. I was transferred to different prisons, to different facilities, to another emirate, Ras al-Khaimah, and I was locked up in the biggest prison complex there, and I really didn't know when or if they would even let me out. It was only after 66 long days that I got out, after signing a power of attorney - that was not easy either - to an expensive Arab lawyer. And only he got to the court where the file was and was able to see it.

And there he simply found out that it was a very simple substitution - I had been mistaken for a completely different person from another country, who was really wanted.

**Karel:**

That's a really fascinating story, because how often does something like that happen? I mean, to be afraid to change planes in Dubai now.

**Josef:**

I would lighten it up a little bit because anything can happen to a person in life. I don't take it as some kind of a knock on the system there - it just happened. Something failed, whether it was human or systemic.

But rather, I want to show with my story that even if a person gets into a really unpleasant and delicate situation, he doesn't have to succumb to it. On the contrary, he can use it to his advantage.

And that's what I dare say I've done. Because I built my own regime there. I told myself I would not help myself or my relatives if I pined, pined and pined. So while I'm in prison, I'm going to make it as good as I can.

So I started to play sports as much as I could, take daily notes. I really tried to make myself feel happy, regardless of the conditions I was in.

Suddenly I was quite comfortable there. My cellmates were treating me better and better. By the way I was having a positive effect on them, they in turn were treating me nicely.

Respect for them was important because they were mostly Muslims. And it's good to remember that even though we often refer to freedom of speech in our country and we all have our own truth and opinion, it doesn't mean that everybody wants them.

And of course - Islam is built on a certain dogmatism and it is very important to respect that. I've come to realize this and have tried to be respectful of them. And not to go into some discussions.

Islam is built on certain rules and dogmas - and it was important for me to respect that. I realized that there was no need to have discussions or question anything. It was enough to behave respectfully.

Soon I was accepted because of that. It wasn't about accepting their beliefs or converting - it was just simple respect.

And it worked. I stayed myself, kept my routine, and respected their world at the same time. As a result, the time passed surprisingly well and, most importantly, enriched me.

When I came back to the Czech Republic - that was in March 2020 - the covid had just started. And suddenly people started talking about how the lockdown was tying them down, how they felt like they were in prison.

I had a fresh experience of the real thing. And it was there that I realized that even in the most difficult conditions, a person can be happy and internally free.

And I made the most of that experience. I actually quite enjoyed Covid - and I have lived a much happier life since then.

**Karel:**

That's a beautiful example of how we can look at our lives. For me, a positive outlook is to see life as a great school. What happens to us - the hardships - is something that in retrospect, if we open ourselves up to it, very often enriches us. Of course, when one is in those troubles and suffering, it's crazy hard. But it's still worth trying to have the attitude that maybe it will do some good. This is a beautiful example of how an insanely traumatic event can end up being a fantastic life-enriching experience.

**Josef:**

That's right. We live in a world where not everything is rosy. We know that, there's a lot of negative events and information around us. And it's not even desirable for everything to be rosy. It would be too easy. But when one doesn't realize this and negatively assesses what a crazy time it is, it's important at a time like this to realize how I myself contribute to feeling good in such a world. I can often just notice these things, but not get unnecessarily emotionally involved. Of course, it's different when it involves those closest to me or me personally. But how many times do we deal with some things unnecessarily and it affects not only our psyche but also our health. It encourages negative thinking, so we worry all the more and more often and we pass it on to others. We need to become aware of this and gradually change it. Stylize the attention in some way: Do I want to deal with it? Or does dealing with it make me worry? The choice is always mine. It's great that we always get to choose, even though sometimes we think that may not be the case.

## How to be a responsible observer

**Karel:**

I've heard the nice term "responsible observer." The way I see reality is that when we see things that we don't like, it's one thing to perceive it and give it some attention, but in what way? If a person engages emotionally and it bothers them and destroys them, now they're thinking about it, then as you say, they're giving it negative energy and reinforcing the thing. On the other hand, when there are things that are wrong, a person's basic responsibility may be to try to do something about it if they have the opportunity. That's a good way, I think, without the clinging, without the emotional involvement with the negative. I think that's the key - the combination of knowing not to give energy to negative things and also taking some kind of responsibility for your life.

**Josef:**

It's generally known that what you give attention to grows. Where we direct our attention, we inadvertently support it energetically, and therefore it grows in strength. I would go back to the observer, it's great that you said responsible. Why responsible and not just an observer? Because behind the observer many times can be an alibi. I don't want to confront something unpleasant, so I'd rather not have an opinion. Which is alibism. Responsible observer is about taking action, but without emotion. I'm not just observing, I'm taking a responsible approach and taking the necessary steps. Then that's the active element. And the second thing is that I really enjoy that emotion, switch into the user and enjoy the pleasure.

**Karel:**

So the recipe for happiness is not just about seeing the good and turning a blind eye to the bad, but seeing things that are not in our alignment without emotional involvement as a responsible observer. Giving attention to fix it somehow, but without personal emotion. At the same time, be happy, enjoy the good, and give emotion only to what we like. Such an asymmetrical approach to life.

## What are the benefits of stepping out of your comfort zone

**Josef:**

Exactly. Then you can be like us in a beautiful stream where there are tadpoles... and now something ran over my foot, a fish, and instead of being negative and stressed, I enjoyed the moment.

**Karel:**

Yes, that's a beautiful example. Try to accept new and surprising things with openness as an interesting, good thing, and not with fear.

**Josef:**

It can be built up and learned gradually. Just like when a person goes to school to learn something as part of their education, or when a toddler learns to walk - we're still evolving, we're still learning. One can learn not to react negatively to some unexpected circumstances and changes, but to use them to one's advantage as an asset. That's why I mentioned the example of something running over my foot or swimming over. It can be built up gradually. Personally, when I can speak from experience, I can respond very quickly. I can assess a situation fairly quickly and act accordingly. I don't get into chaos or freak out. When I need to react so I don't get hurt, I can do that. But more than that, I've awakened my confidence in life - that conversely, not so many things need to happen to me if I don't pay attention. That's why things are still more pleasant to me than they used to be when I had my attention on worrying about what all might happen to me.

**Karel:**

I think attention and thoughts affect reality, so it's not a coincidence. It's a systematic thing that you attract.

**Josef:**

We don't have to go into some esoteric wisdom, but it's a common thing. Observe who you surround yourself with - you are the intersection of the people who are around you. When we are in a negative environment, it affects us, we become negative. When we are around people who are curious, we become curious too, we get better at awakening our curiosity. Similarly, positive people - when they are positive, we start to feel better in that environment. Of course, it's not about having only positive people around us, we have to work for that, but we can also create the conditions for that. Like attracts like.

## How to get out of depression by running

**Karel:**

And actually being able to look at emotions like that and pick out the positive is maybe one of the secrets behind your huge records, what you're capable of. Could you give us some insight into how to do that? How do you overcome the hard stuff?

**Josef:**

It's exactly as you say. I had one very unpleasant experience before prison when my then girlfriend left me. I realized that I still had emotional attachments and addictions that controlled me more than I could control them. I needed a change. At that point I was really depressed and still had an unhealthy lifestyle. I had already built up some positive thinking, but this situation was dragging me down mentally. I smoked, indulged in alcohol and overeating. A friend inspired me because I sometimes expressed that I needed to do something healthy, like running. And he said: "Come on, I used to run half marathons, I'd love to run with you." At first I was almost scared because I was overweight, I didn't know how to breathe properly and I wasn't fit. It's not easy to just run. Starting from scratch is always the hardest. I realised it helped me not to focus on the relationship that ended, the regret of losing my partner. I told myself I'd take it as therapy and go again tomorrow to redirect that attention elsewhere. This was my system that started to work.

I even started running barefoot a few months later because I was very close to it. I've always found contact with nature through my bare feet very pleasant. I even started running distances like the half marathon and others. I started working with mindfulness. When something was difficult, I didn't want to pay attention to the discomfort, but to how to overcome it. I didn't stop, I started breathing differently and exploring how to handle it. Gradually, I built the ability to use mindfulness to my advantage even in extreme situations.

**Karel:**

So it's not about getting hard, but finding a way around the discomfort.

**Josef:**

Exactly. They say a man can stand more than a horse. It's a human, natural analogy and it's true. We have enormous potential and we can handle a lot. But when we start doubting ourselves, not believing in ourselves, paying attention to the fact that something hurts us and making a camel out of a gnat, we understandably lose the ability to overcome unpleasant situations. We get used to the comfortable state that society has amazingly built for us. We live in excellent conditions where some people go hunting in the supermarket with exaggeration. It is a comfortable time and does not force us to put ourselves in discomfort and face something difficult. Unless we are personally challenged and build up the discipline or the inner drive to face it ourselves, even the very small things start to scare us.

## Why comfort is a threat

**Karel:**

I am convinced that this is one of the fundamental problems of modern society - comfort and the search for security. We think that the state or someone else will take care of us and we don't have to try at all. This is terribly dangerous. I see this as a great tool of manipulation - manipulation through fear and comfort. People today are not encouraged to go outside their

comfort zone. Historically, we've always had to fight for survival in a good way, because hard things make us stronger.

What can modern society do about that? For me, the guidance is to actively expose ourselves to situations outside our comfort zone, for example through physical activity, hardening ourselves or other ways. And at the same time, I believe it's important to guide children to do this as well. Not to put them in trauma, but to teach them that discomfort can be a good thing.

**Josef:**

I totally agree. They say that different generations come and go - people are strong and build a strong society. But that strong society becomes comfortable and the next generation becomes weaker. The society collapses, there's a global problem, wars or something like that. People are then forced to find strength again because it requires survival. However, I am increasingly coming across the view that we are at a stage where we are becoming acutely aware of this, and many of us are able to find ways out of our comfort zone even in these comfortable times. By personal example, showing others how to be more resilient, more capable, have stronger immunity, and better able to withstand stress and pressures, because these times are full of pressure. And then pass that on. I see this as a positive thing, because there are more and more people who realise that they cannot be victims of these times. They must prepare themselves to be able to face the unpleasantness that is coming and will come.

**Karel:**

I see it that way too and I believe it's extremely important. We live in a unique historical time of global change and interconnectedness. In the past, civilizations have thrived, become comfortable, collapsed, and started again - maybe there was a war or some other kind of collapse in between. But we cannot collapse today, because another world war would be the final one. Or if we succumb to seduction and allow ourselves to be controlled, as in China, for example, we could end up in a totalitarian system from which there is no escape, because it will be controlled by technology. We must avoid that.

For me, the key is to have more people like you who motivate people not to be afraid, to go outside their comfort zone, to overcome fear and not to be manipulated. I see this from my own experience as well - when a person overcomes a fear or an effort, in retrospect, they find that it's not that hard. People are most afraid of what they don't know.

**Josef:**

That's exactly right, and I thank you for the compliment. Truly the world is now connected through technology, the internet and mobile connectivity. Suddenly we don't just live in a small locality. We are aware of what is happening in the world. It puts us in front of the mirror to realise that we also have a responsibility for global events, not just for ourselves. It is very important to set an example. You could really say to the whole world, even if it doesn't look like it at first glance, how can I influence global events.

**Karel:**

I would maybe say, each of us can set an example for the whole world.



## How a personal record becomes an inspiration to millions

**Josef:**

It certainly can. I didn't have the confidence to believe I could have that kind of reach before, even though I knew the possibility was there. But something happened that I would never have imagined at the time. Because of those records and the story I experienced, the documentary was made. And it's now at the gate of global distribution.

**Karel:**

The film is great. Well made and really entertaining. You don't usually say documentaries are funny, but this one really is. It's not available yet, but it will be soon.

**Josef:**

It will be. And I have the honor of naming you as one of the interviewees in it. I'm grateful for that. The film will be in theaters and on streaming soon, the public will know about it. And I want to express that I had no idea the impact it would have. When I set the first record - for the longest endurance plank - it was an exercise that strengthens the entire body.

By the way, it was in prison in the Emirates that I started this exercise because it is minimalist in space and conditions. I started at two minutes. The body is held flat off the ground on the forearms, supported only by the toes. It's very challenging. Many people have trouble lasting more than two, three, five minutes.

I also started at two minutes and through mindfulness work I worked my way up to a world record of 9 hours, 38 minutes and 47 seconds. Guinness World Records distributed it around the world and we found out that 100 million people have seen it on social media.

**Karel:**

That's fancy. In Japan, South America...

**Josef:**

All over the place. Every continent except the Arctic and Antarctica. BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera. People were contacting me, thanking me, because the documentary was not only about the record, but also about why I was doing it and how I was doing it.

## How to overcome your own limits

**Josef:**

I've never been an extreme athlete. The last time I played sports was during my school years. From then until I was 48, I was very passive in terms of movement.

**Karel:**

That's fantastic. I personally was never an athlete either. I was the clumsy one as a kid. My parents split us up - my brother was the smart one, I was the smart one. As a result, I grew up with the mindset of being the clumsy one and my brother grew up with the mindset of being the stupid one. I started doing competitive gymnastics when I was forty. And I found out that anything goes. It's all about the head.

**Josef:**

Exactly. I started at 48. In 2018, I started running - I was 48, I'm a 1970. And in 2021, three years after that, I had my first world record. Although not yet officially with Guinness, but with the Dobrý den Pelhřimov Agency. It was the fastest half marathon run barefoot, in the snow. I beat Wim Hof, whose record was in the Guinness Book, by 40 minutes.

And that's when I realized that it really works. That I could show people that age is not a limitation. Even disability doesn't have to be a barrier. I, for example, had problems with cold - my peripherals had poor blood circulation, my hands and feet were cold, I was the cold-hearted type.

When reporters once asked me why I started hardening, I said, "I got angry at what was bothering me." And I started doing something about it, so I started toughening up.

**Josef:**

One other interesting thing about planking - my back is arched in the lumbar region, so it's harder to hold that position than if I had a straight spine. But I still worked with it, and through mindfulness, faith, and confidence, I worked my way up to those feats.

Because that's the overlap. I don't do it for the records. They just allow me to let people see it. And I can give them the idea of why I'm doing it. And that it's possible. If they believe it, and they want it, and they start doing something about it, they can. I don't mean they have to practice plank. But they can overcome anything that they think is insurmountable for them.

## How to build discipline

**Karel:**

And what would you recommend for people who are willing to go outside of their comfort zone and make the effort? Do you have a method for knowing when to ease up, when to stop pushing through?

**Josef:**

First of all, it's important to enjoy it. That we don't get discouraged just because we're doing it out of conviction or because we're overcoming something that's uncomfortable. We need to build a healthy habit that starts to convince us. Not ourselves.

And how to do that? Let's look at children. They do things joyfully and playfully. That means there's no need to study techniques on exactly how to run or breathe. A friend called me and said she wanted to start running, but that it was a "dirty word" to her, so she literally said it. She asked what she should do to change that. I advised her: Go somewhere where no one will see you. So you won't be uncomfortable. Hop, skip, hiss, run, play. Be happy in your body and try it this way.

And it worked for her the first time. She loved it, and she's been running ever since. And she loves it.

That means: joyful and playful. And then we can start adding technique, speed, distance, breathing. But if the joy isn't there from the start, it's harder to find. If you don't have it right from the start, it's hard to catch back up.

The second thing is to do it in an unpretentious way. Don't set big goals, but do it gradually. And most importantly - regularly.

Playfully, simply, regularly. These are the elements that will become so ingrained in the new habit that it won't even occur to us afterwards. Like when we brush our teeth in the morning,

we might go for a run. It can be transferred into a very normal routine. But the best way to get into it is in these ways - it worked for me and that's how I pass it on.

**Karel:**

That's great. Basically, it's the ideal scenario - we're going outside our comfort zone ourselves, putting in the effort, and enjoying it at the same time.

**Josef:**

That's right. Especially in the beginning, we have to trust ourselves that we want it and that this is how it works and it will move us. It's not a "Joska Šálek said it, so I'll do it and it will work" approach. You have to start feeling it yourself.

The pitfalls are - and I have noticed this, I don't want to put it on anyone - that you say, "What would I get out of this life if I didn't have a cigarette with my coffee or a couple of beers?"

And why not, of course. But the important thing is to realize if it doesn't have too much power over me anymore. If drop by drop it hasn't gotten to the point where I might have gout in my body. I've had it. Uric acid started to build up on my joints because of my uncontrolled lifestyle and it was very painful. I also had elevated sugar. So I told myself enough, I don't want it anymore. It's just that if you don't have the confidence, you don't have the strength to face it. And that confidence is built by healthy habits and getting out of your comfort zone. Suddenly you think, "Wow, I can do better. Wow, I feel better and better in this body that I've started to train a little bit." And suddenly he finds, "Wow, I feel better when I eat lighter food." I don't have to have a steak. I can have it occasionally, but the lighter the food, the better I feel in my body. And I want to keep going. That comfort inside the body, that relaxed feeling, then often transcends those indulgences.

So - enjoy life, but notice when I'm already a victim of those pleasures. When it's not for my continued health and well-being. And start to change that. Start believing in it, make a decision. And then do it - as I said - playfully, joyfully, simply and regularly.

**Karel:**

And what's nice - one doesn't have to go "for blood" and destroy oneself because of it. Sure, if someone is a top athlete and wants to be at the top in his narrow specialty, then there's probably no other way. But I believe that the healthy and holistic approach is to just go for the discomfort.

I try to optimize it so that one puts in the effort, but at the same time it is bearable. It may not be the most enjoyable at the time - you have to work hard. But the feelings afterwards more than make up for it. It's an investment in the short term.

**Josef:**

Exactly. And when you get to a state that - and I'll dare say it - I personally feel I'm in the best shape I've ever been in, I feel the best I've ever felt in my life, and I'm doing the best I've ever done in my life, then of course why would I go back. I'm not saying that I don't indulge in the occasional thing that doesn't quite fit into a healthy lifestyle. But I don't go over that edge that would hurt or harm me.

**Karel:**

You don't have to be a perfectionist.

**Josef:**

It's a natural progression. And if I hadn't been an indulger and a foodie myself before, if I hadn't compensated for my lack of pleasure through overeating and testing all kinds of flavors and things through food and substitutes, I wouldn't have that comparison. And now it's better.

I even have periods where I only drink nutritional supplements and put almost nothing of substance in. And that's the state I live best in. I feel relaxed, comfortable. I'm nourishing my body, but I don't need to cram it, stuff it.

## Why is peace in restlessness the greatest strength

### **Karel:**

Great. Tell me again, please - when you're in that plank and a full-blown crisis comes, how do you manage your attention then? Can you give a specific moment? An example of when it was really on the edge and how did you handle it?

### **Josef:**

I noticed that my belief structure started to change. You have to be strong in the head first to be able to hold the body. If we believe in performance, the body accepts it and continues on, even if it is already sending signals that something hurts or that it can't. When we hold the performance with our head - with awareness and trust - the body gradually gets used to it despite the difficulty.

I noticed this especially with the plank. I don't just do endurance plank, but also plank with a load - maybe with a backpack on my back. Now I'm preparing to break the world record with 100 pounds, or 45 kilograms, on my back. It's very difficult to maintain a plank with that much weight. And that's where my head starts to shut down after a minute - it says I can't do it anymore. But the body has learned to cope with it. I've somehow written it in with this training. And it's great that the body can gradually be programmed to the point that it can hold you up even when the mind fails.

### **Karel:**

So before, it would be a situation where you would give up, that you can't really do it anymore. And now, even though the head says it can't be done, you keep it up through inertia.

### **Josef:**

Yes, now it's supporting each other. You no limits situations move on. It used to be that you held on by force of will, by your head.

### **Karel:**

And now the body takes over? Do you get to a state where the body holds itself?

### **Josef:**

Also. But there's more to it. I try to concentrate, feel calm, breathe deeply into the belly, focus on the exhalation, so that the body calms down even in tension. When the attention went into tension, there was an identification. And with that, the difficulty of the exercise entered the mind. The whole thing collapsed. But when I look for the benefit even in the obstacle and a way to get over it, I don't have to quit just because it's there.

And this is the system. I focus on observation. I said that in an interview at the world record, after nine and a half hours, with one media outlet. I kept holding the plank and calmly saying I was observing the storm that was going on in my body, but that doesn't mean I have to identify with it.

I just feel it, I'm aware of it, but I don't pay attention to it. A very intense, dynamic meditation - to get into stillness even in restlessness.

And what can it help? It's not about holding extreme plank or exercises, but it helps me. If one gradually enters the uncomfortable zones, one can learn to be at peace even in restlessness - in the restlessness of society, in the chaos that surrounds us, in the ever more intense changes. To be able to react, to remain calm, to make the right decision - one that is both beneficial to ourselves and useful to others.

**Karel:**

In other words, when you're in a difficult situation, to try to put yourself in the role of observer, to look at it from the outside and detach yourself from it.

**Josef:**

Working with mindfulness - focusing it on calmness, not restlessness. For example, I started running barefoot. I used to do transitions over glass shards or hot coals as part of coping with stressful situations and fears. Voluntarily, of course. I have done several hundred events and thousands of people who have done it. It boosted their confidence, even though it may seem crazy at first. But when it's done with the proper safety and knowledge, it's a boost to overcome fear, fear of injury or pain.

This has gradually brought me to this point, to the level where very uncomfortable circumstances come up. Sometimes I face them. I can keep calm around them, and that's why I can go beyond.

You mentioned extreme athletes, but even though I have a world record, I don't think I hold it with strength or in extreme stress. I enjoy it. I train to keep my body going, but not in a crazy way. The crazy thing for me was hearing about the training of my predecessors - how many hours a day, at what intensity, at what load, how many hundreds and thousands of push-ups, lay-sits and hours of planking they did to get to breaking the record. That's not how I have it. There is another way to do it - take it as a challenge and stay calm about it. The body will learn. At first, I struggled minute by minute to push myself in the plank. Then came the realization - why fight when discomfort is part of the exercise? That's what it's all about. Life isn't just about the pink, it's about the thorns. I began to accept the pain and suffering and suddenly my body could handle it. All I had to do was change the settings. I started to find rest in it, and suddenly it got better and better.

## How an individual can change the whole world

**Karel:**

That's beautiful. We're back to the point that it makes sense to focus on the fact that what is hard, what looks like suffering, may not actually be suffering.

**Josef:**

It's about point of view. In no way do I want to minimize the unpleasant moments that someone experiences as real suffering. Everybody has it differently and nobody lives in the

skin of others. The fundamental thing is to respect that someone feels differently. That's okay. I'm just speaking for myself - I've been through something: fears, addictions, low self-esteem.

By the way, I was very afraid of public speaking. I wouldn't have spoken in front of an audience back then. Is this training? It is. It was one of the big challenges. At the same time, I have a proven athletic performance that shows you can do it at any age. I'm definitely not packing it in. I have other challenges ahead of me and I'm moving on. It's just my experience. Those who want to can be inspired by it - those who don't don't have to. And that's the beauty of it. We don't have to fight, convince, prove that one truth applies to all. We can have our own opinion. And it is by respecting others that we can enrich them the most. Because when we push others and try to convince them of something, the result is that they go into opposition and don't want change.

**Karel:**

I agree. What's great is when you offer something and the other person can take something from it, but they don't have to. It's a free choice.

**Josef:**

I had that in my family. In the beginning, they looked at my change of mindset and lifestyle with some disagreement. Today, when they see that it works, that the film was made, that I'm starting to inspire people... They appreciate it and start to change themselves. They see from my example that it's possible. And we know that it is in the immediate family that changing the settings is the most difficult - even if we feel it would be beneficial for them.

**Karel:**

One is not a prophet at home. That's classic psychology. It has its reasons.

**Josef:**

The important thing is to live your life, let others live, be present. So that when they feel weak, they can feel strength and support. If we struggle along with them, they can't ask us for help in a meaningful way. The most we can do is relieve them by hurting too.

**Karel:**

And that makes no sense at all. There are basic principles and values in our world. For me, it's freedom. The meaning of life. If totalitarianism or a dictatorship were to come, where freedom disappears and a slave system is created, I will do everything I can to prevent that from happening. No suffering, no negative emotions. But with determination. In principle, it makes no sense to live in slavery - and, if necessary, to sacrifice one's life for something that makes sense. Not with a sense of dread, but with peace. If that option should arise, I'm prepared to go for it. And that is the best chance of it not happening. I believe determination is the key.

**Josef:**

By the way, I know that the setting plays a big role. I attract circumstances based on what I believe and how I feel about them - whether I'm attuned positively or negatively. As they say: fortune favours the prepared. When it's needed, it's important to take action and take care of it. And as you said - both belief and the settings in the head are conducive to that. In my case, it's doubly true. When I relate it to sports and performance, I know that faith played a

bigger role than body readiness. For example, when training for the longest plank, I never went over three and a half hours straight. And I had to beat the time of nine and a half hours. And I wasn't able to go any further. But I believed it, and it happened.

**Karel:**

That's admirable. If somebody had told me that and I didn't know you, I would have said it's not athletically possible.

**Josef:**

Even though I know that this ability - to believe strongly - is in all of us, and that it can help us overcome lack of preparation or doubts about our own abilities, I still find that I feel better when I make sure I can reach a given limit in training before I go out for an official performance. I try not to build on that, though. A lot of athletes need to make sure first before they even believe they can do it. And that's where the edge is - they lack belief, so they look for proof.

This is to build on what you said: being prepared, taking the necessary steps when needed. But that doesn't mean I don't believe what I said - that we are responsible for freedom and happiness even in unfree situations. This setup connects the internal attitude with external, concrete actions. It's one thing to go from the inside, another to go from the outside. I will set myself internally, but that doesn't mean I won't respond to external stimuli. I don't let them go unnoticed when it's time to act. With the open setup I present here, it is also key to have a strong boundary - not letting manipulation or pressure get to me, which I respect, but live differently. There's a firmness, a decisiveness, a proactivity, as well as a respect and belief that I have it just right.

Then it can work.

**Karel:**

Well, if you want to take inspiration from Pepa as well, tell us where we can find you?

**Josef:**

Definitely on the website [www.joskasalek.cz](http://www.joskasalek.cz) - you can find my activities and stays in beautiful places like Sri Lanka.

There are also my books there. Among other things, an authentic story from an Arab prison that still helps me today. It was written right there, in the present experience. After it was published, people found out how to react in an extreme situation - and because of that it helps them in their own difficult moments.

There is also the Discomfort Handbook - a little book that shows how to mentally adjust to different circumstances and conditions. So that one can perceive them as beneficial and not be so afraid of them.

That's one of the main contacts. Other than that, I'm also on regular social media - Instagram and Facebook.

Oh, and the film will be available soon, so you'll hear about that too.

**Karel:**

So I hope that for some viewers our interview was an inspiration and that maybe it's a guide to making your life as happy as possible.

**Josef:**

Thank you - and I would add one more thing. I see this whole journey as my mission. I'm open to new connections, to opportunities to create an inspiring environment for others together. In order to do that, I also need some security. What I do - including the activities related to Guinness World Records - is financially demanding. If someone feels they want to collaborate, the space exists to do so. I also offer support to top athletes or managers. Not one-to-one coaching, but a form of collaboration that shows by concrete example how a positive and strong mind-set works - and how it helps to be even more successful. I don't have it listed on the website yet, but the opportunity is there. Anyone who senses it can contact me.

**Karel:**

Thank you for the wonderful interview and let me express my wish that this world, our civilization, is successful, that we as humans are happier and we all find our calling.