

Werner May

*Dare Trust*

# From **Stress No** to **Healing No**

*Overcome Distrust*



According to a survey, 81 percent of Germans say Yes too often and are angry with themselves afterwards.

One reason for this is that, on the one side, we are afraid of stress in relationships, and on the other side we have seldom learned to say No.

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**The Healing No does not separate, but connects and seeks to create durable and valuable relationships.**

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For over 25 years now, Werner May, Dipl. Psych., author and publicist, has been researching the art of saying No.

“Recognising what is important, understanding this in its scientific dimension, and then translating it into everyday life, adding lived-out faith like yeast into dough, humour – like spice – cannot be left out: that is how I understand my task!”



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## From **Stress No** to **Healing No**

*Dare Trust – Overcome Distrust*

## Do some of these personal goals, or at least one of them, apply to you?

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I want to

- find a real yes I can stand up for,
- say no if I mean no,
- learn to speak a no that is taken seriously,
- be a head rather than a tail in life,
- win deeper relationships,
- gain more space for myself to live,
- help others to follow rules,
- help others to overcome their mistrust,
- find inner strength, together with others,  
in my relationships.



If one or more of these goals apply to you, then go on a reading tour now.

Duration? 10 minutes – 1 hour – or...?

This e-book is a criss-cross reading book: scroll through it until a thought “strikes” you.

## At the beginning a “humble” confession

*“We Viennese, we do it very differently with saying no”, I was told after a lecture in Austria.*

That did not surprise me, because there are inter-cultural differences in dealing with saying no. For example, in some countries it is not polite to say no to an authority person.

However, such differences underline the importance of the concept of “The Healing No”, as it probably affects all people in developing a socially acceptable way of dealing with the tension between trust and mistrust in using yes and no.

So the challenge is not so much whether “The Healing No” can be used the same way in every detail in Africa, Asia or anywhere else in the world, but whether the basic ideas can sensitise us and bring us closer to one another.

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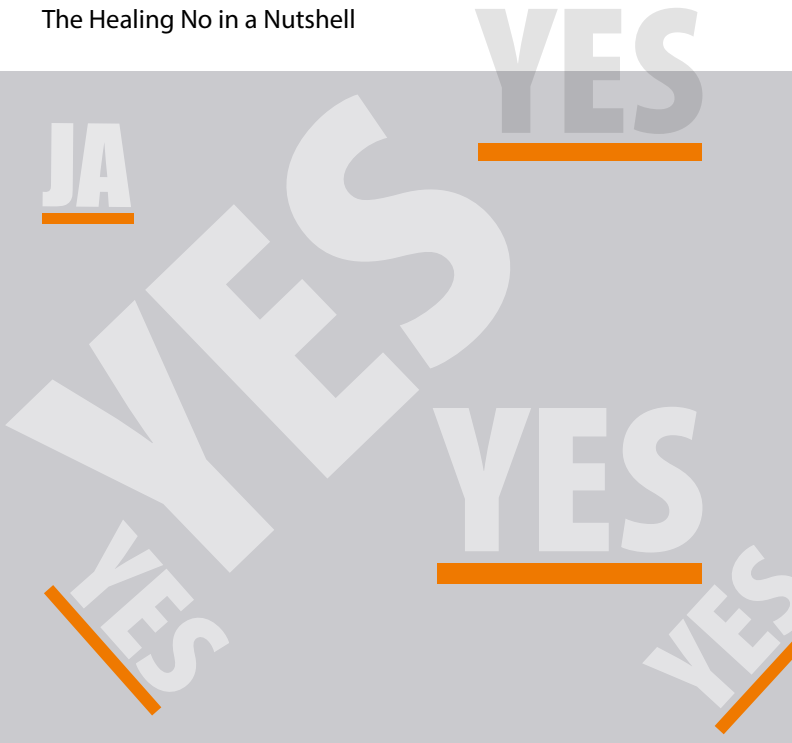
**“We need a reconciliation with the no”**



The Healing No in a Nutshell

For quality relationships  
you need

a **RELIABLE YES,**  
a **WISE NOT YET**  
and  
a **HEALING NO.**



**The reliable yes** is aware of its quality of its Yes, is not exaggerated and also not “withered”, but has thought through the reasons behind it well.



Not Yet

Humans live in time and the Not Yet marks the time dimension of life.

The time is not always ripe for a yes or a no.

It is wise not to allow time pressure to push you into a yes or no.



**The Healing No** is a no that does not separate, but seeks to deepen relationships and create trust alongside the meaning and purpose of the no.

It connects people with one another instead of separating them.

*“The shortest words,  
yes and no,  
require the most  
thought.”*

Pythagoras  
(um 570 v. Chr.; † nach 510 v. Chr.)

Boundaries make sense



**Yes**  
**Not Yet**  
and  
**No**

**shape our boundaries.**

“Yes, please come closer!”

“Please wait, I need some a little more time!”

“No, stop, stay where you are!”



**The Healing No shapes  
our boundaries**





Boundaries make sense



## Boundaries deserve our trust

as long as they  
stay vital and flexible  
and are not rigid.



## Look for living boundaries

On the beach there is a boundary between sea and land, but a moving one, a living one.

It moves with ebb and flow.

It creates a border area, a living border.



Boundaries make sense



## Living boundaries serve to deepen relationships

A fixed limit is in danger of becoming entirely about rules, about laws, about money, about perfection.

A living boundary is about the person and the sense which should part of the actions, the tasks, the relationships, and ultimately our lives.



It is rare for two or more people to have exactly matching opinions.

Living boundaries give us space in which to get closer to each other.



Boundaries make sense



## Living boundaries shape the way we interact

Boundaries should serve us.

We must therefore say goodbye to rigid boundaries, and we need the courage for living boundaries!

With the rigid boundary, we are in danger of losing sight of the meaning of our no or yes. Then it's primarily about the rule, about the law, not about the person any more.



With living boundaries, one has to understand the meaning of border demarcation and, in the concrete situation, find out the relevant boundary within the larger boundary area – and at the same time preserve its meaning, and even become more aware of it.





## An exercise to illustrate this

I like to illustrate living boundaries with this little role play:

First of all, I approach a course participant. This person then has to say stop when I get too close to him/her, which they do, as a rule, when the distance gets down to between one and half a metre. Then the second variant comes. I take a run at the person and approach at speed. This time they set the boundary much earlier, already stopping me at 2-3 m.

This is meant to illustrate that a no turns out differently, depending on the situation. A living boundary between half a metre and 3 m, as in our example, indicates a "tolerance band" within which the sense of this no, intended to protect the speaker from too much closeness, is still clearly understood.



## Living boundaries need preparation time

When it comes to sounding out where the limiting area should be, a technique with successive left/right approaches can help.

An example:

My 14-year-old daughter wants to go out for the evening. She asks me how long you can stay out. I picture in my mind, approaching it from the "right", so to speak, what the very latest time could be: 2 o'clock in the morning, no; 1 o'clock in the morning, no; midnight, no; 23:30, perhaps. Then I approach from the left: 21:00 at the earliest, no; 22:00, yes. So the result is a living boundary between 22:00 and 23:00.

If I am an experienced, I will not speak to my daughter about this two minutes before she leaves the house, but in good time, perhaps before the evening meal, so as to be able to exchange views with her. In the course of this, she will notice that she is not dealing with a discussion partner with a rigid boundary who has already made his decision regardless of what she is going to say.



Boundaries make sense



## Living boundaries need preparation time

In each case find out, negotiate, detect the boundary:

this sounds strenuous, and in fact it is.

In this situation, we would certainly prefer if there were clear, firm boundaries applying in all situations.

But do these really exist?

Aren't there always tolerance bands, living boundaries?

It is worth the effort. It brings us closer together.



## Daring to have living boundaries

Boundaries are there for man, not man for the boundaries.

We do not sacrifice anyone to a boundary.

It is always a question of the person and not only of the rule, not only of the law.

Rules and boundaries serve us, but they should not be allowed to be an end in themselves.



Boundaries make sense



## Boundaries are something good!

The picture of the living shoreline can be supplemented by the picture of the guardrail.

Every no, like a guardrail, sets a boundary with a threefold function:

- It gives us orientation where the path is no longer visible.
- It protects us when we are in danger of straying off the path.
- And it protects others from us, or us from others, when we or they go off the path.



## “Guardrail boundaries” are meaningful, but only in the right place.

For example, decisive action is needed in a crisis, following an accident, in a medical emergency, under genuine time pressure...



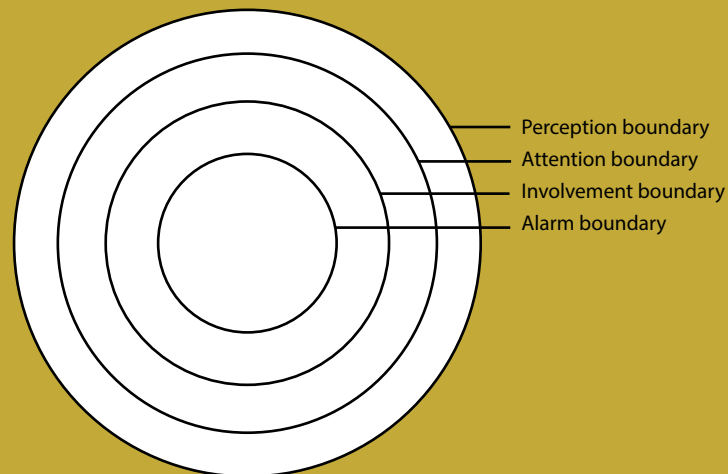
Boundaries make sense



**Boundaries deserve  
our trust  
as long as  
they are alive and flexible  
and do not have to be rigid  
from the start.**



## Our inner boundaries



(From Resch 1996)





## Inner boundaries: first example

Imagine you are walking on the pavement. As you look ahead, another person comes into view would in principle have been visible to you earlier, but only now crosses your perception boundary. Then you ask yourself if you know this person. This is the moment when they cross your attention boundary. Normally, this person will then go past you and will soon disappear from your world. But this person stops and asks you if you know of any cheap overnight accommodation. Now they have crossed the involvement boundary. You have to decide whether you will spend time on this person. Afterwards, he/she will again leave your involvement, attention and perception boundaries. This person could however ask you if you would like to join them for a cup of coffee. Now he/she is on the point of crossing the alarm boundary.



## Inner boundaries: second example

After our Sunday service I am talking to a friend, whom I have not seen for a long time. Another person comes along, listens to us and wants to join the conversation.

With this action, he has not only strayed over our attention boundary. We not only notice that he is there, but he has also crossed the involvement boundary: we have to deal with him.

He causes us stress, because at that moment we have opened our "inner boundaries" just for one another and not for a third party. We would prefer to send him away, which we actually have a right to do, because he was not sensitive and did not respect our different inner boundaries.





Boundaries make sense



## What may approach my four inner boundaries today?

Who and what will cross my perceptual boundary?  
Which advertisements will be at the side of the road?

What will hit my involvement boundary? The neighbour with his motorcycle noise?

What will affect me? How close will I allow the problems and weaknesses of others to get to me?  
Do I want to hear about them at all?

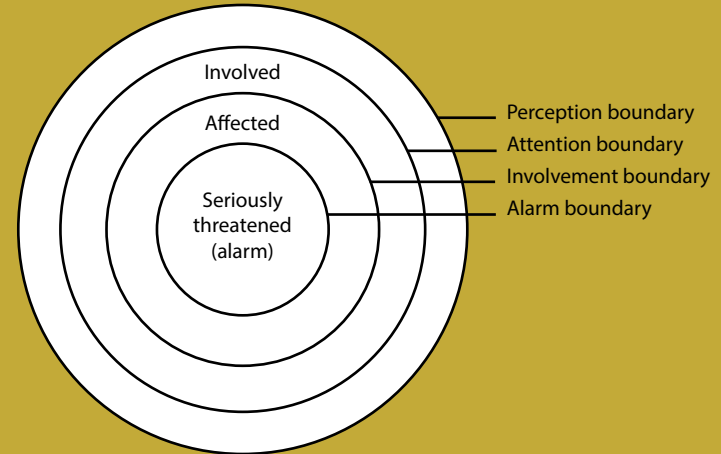
Where will I feel threatened today? By my supervisor or by alcoholised fellow citizens?

What do I want? How should it be? How consciously will I play a role?

**My yes, no or not yet is needed.**



## Das Verbindende Nein stärkt unsere Inneren Grenzen



(From Resch 1996)



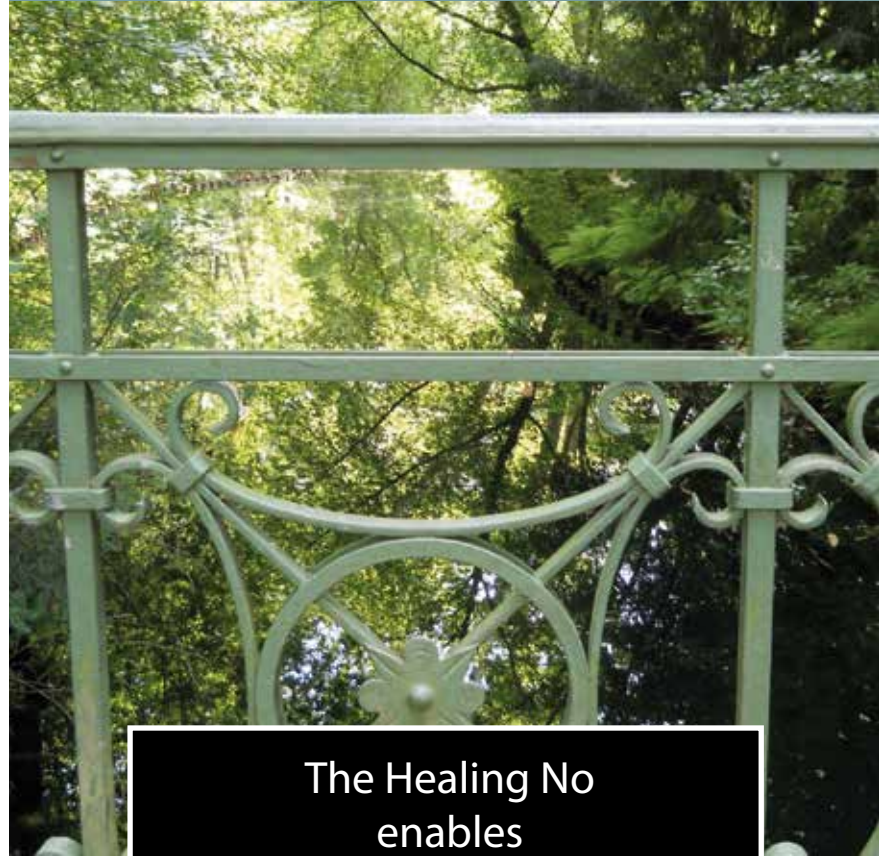
Boundaries make sense



## The fivefold meaning of a Healing No

With the Healing No

- we can support and advance others
- our legitimate needs are protected
- our values will win
- we will achieve our goals
- relationships will gain in capacity and depth



The Healing No  
enables  
a meaningful life.





## **The first sense dimension: a “no” which protects the safety of others**

You are out to dinner one evening with someone you know.

This person has drunk three beers and asks you if you agree that he/she drives.

(It is his/her car, but you have a driving license.)

Here your no is a no that seeks to protect the other person: a safety protection no.

Caution:

It is important with safety limits that you ask yourself what concrete danger you want to protect the other from. First name it, and then check: is this really true?



## **The second sense dimension: A “no” that reflects my needs**

You are at work and just about to leave. A colleague comes to ask you for help, which would take about 30 minutes. You know that others could help and have time.

Here your no protects your own needs. We all have limits that we should not exceed (e.g. we need enough sleep), and we also have e.g. a right to have free time with friends.

It is important here have the courage to express your own needs, but equally to have the freedom to voluntarily renounce your needs on certain occasions out of love for the other.





## **The third sense dimension: a “no” which expresses my values**

A value-no starts with “I think that it is important or right that...”. For example, “I think it’s right not to speak negatively about absent persons.”

Everyone has a right to values. Only we do not all have the same values.

Be open to the values and beliefs of the other. Let others tell you what exactly they think and feel and consider valuable.

A value-no needs discussion. This is tiring, but it gives our no strength if that is still required.



## **The fourth sense dimension: a “no” which achieves goals**

You are responsible for preparing a colleague’s birthday party and have made a schedule and organisational plan with others, who will help.

One day before the party, the colleague responsible for the drinks asks if someone else could take care of the drinks.

You have a goal. To achieve this goal, you have made decisions, plans, coordinated, and involved others.

You will say no, because time is short, it is probably hard to find a replacement, the task of providing drinks is not so complex,...





## **The fifth sense dimension: a “no” which deepens valuable relationships**

A political election is approaching. A friend asks whether you will vote for his party. You do not intend to do so. If you say no, you know that you both need to talk seriously.

You will respond to his question, express your opposing position, thus saying no to his position, because this relationship is important to you and it is worth getting to know the other better.

A relationship in which everyone can communicate opinions, decisions and wishes openly is considered desirable. To deny myself, or even to pretend to support, will more likely lead to a permanent disconnection rather than a connection.



Which of these five boundaries  
is the most difficult  
for you to set for another  
person with your no?





The results of my own survey show that the most difficult no to say is a no to protect your own needs.

Does being aware of one's needs, or even fulfilling them, cause us to fear being egotistical, self-centred or unloving?

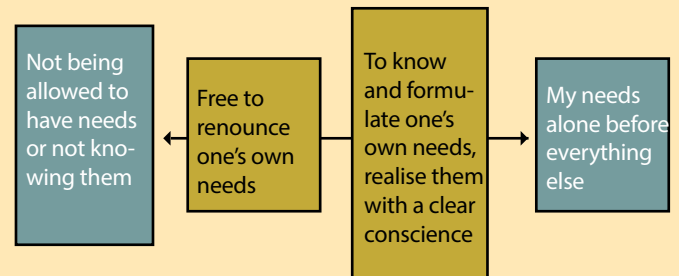


## The Healing NO sets my own needs free!



There are two healthy, thoroughly important perceptions of our needs (> yellow) and there are "red" exaggerations, which are self-centred and unloving.

We should avoid these two exaggerations.



Boundaries make sense



## The Healing NO sets my own needs free!



Every person has needs, has a right to them, should know and express them.

Only then can one make the decision to fulfil or renounce them.

Both belong to a life in faithful relationships:

Showing and fulfilling one's needs, or freely or voluntarily forsaking them, as the situation requires, as it serves others and oneself, as it is possible..



## The fivefold significance of the "no"



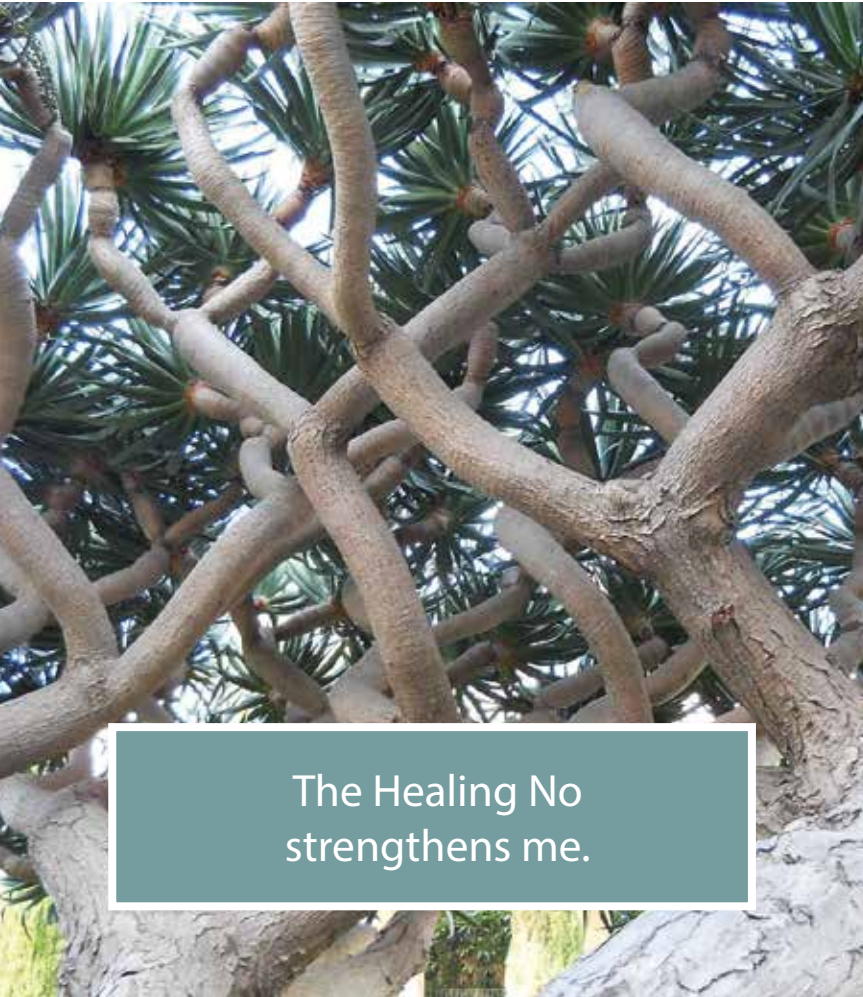
... strengthens my inner conviction that I'm on the right path.

... gives me a perceptible authority, and that makes me more effective.

... but at the same time lets me remain open for the other.



Boundaries make sense



The Healing No  
strengthens me.



*“it was quite new for me to see meaning behind a no and not just a negative feeling. When I became aware of the five sense dimensions, it gave me a great deal of strength, because my no had no longer such shaky legs, but had a solid foundation. That gave me a lot of security in my everyday life.”*

A.M.







## Looking forward to the Healing No

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### We have the right to say no

According to behavioural research, we consciously or unconsciously make more than 20,000 decisions a day, and our inner mental or emotional no and yes are involved in setting these decisions.

That does not really stress us – apart from difficult choices: two or three unpleasant no's with which we have to confront others can darken the whole day.

## The Healing No

The Healing No is a no which is carried by five yes's:

- The yes to the other
- The yes to the no
- The yes to relationships
- The yes of others to me
- The yes which supports the other person



**There is a no which  
is carried by five yes's.**

# 1

## My yes to the other person

The yes to the other “resists” devaluing the person to whom I say no:  
I am on your side, and even if I am saying no now, I am still on your side.

This yes to the other can be seen to be like, for example, putting one’s hand on the other’s shoulder – as a welcome, but it must certainly start in my heart.

## My yes to the other

If I already have fundamental reservations about another person, no matter whether I have to say no or not, it pays to “work on” my image of the other.

I can assume that every person possesses, or has about him, something valuable, or that he has more potential than he himself believes.



## My yes to the other

“I want to understand you.”

One will always think of spontaneous explanations of why the other does something. But these explanations are not necessarily correct.

Understanding the other may mean that I can respond to him differently or correct my opinion of him, perhaps even making a no unnecessary.

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But, to state it clearly:

Understanding the other does not mean that I have to consider him right, but it does mean “being on his side” and being for him, even when I say no to him.



## 2

### My yes to the no

#### Saying no clearly and unwaveringly

My no is clear:

- I say, for example: “No, I need you, you had agreed.” So do not start with “Maybe”, or “It would be nice if..”
- With eye contact:  
Eye contact establishes a relationship and, if it lasts during the no, it intensifies it.
- I also announce consequences, but only if it is really necessary, just and feasible.

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## Consequences?

I recommend trusting in the power of persuasion and in the yes to the other person and to oneself, and only to reinforce the no with the announcement of consequences when it is absolutely necessary.

Normally, consequences imply rewards or punishments which are described as so-called imposed consequences. But there are also natural and logical consequences.

Natural consequences follow without any educative interventions, e.g. when a child touches a hot cooking ring and burns himself.

Logical consequences have a content related logically to the misbehaviour, e.g. when a child makes the floor dirty, he has to clean it himself.

Imposed consequences have no inner relationship with the misbehaviour, e.g. when the child does not do his homework, he receives no ice cream.

## Consequences of driving a car despite three beers

An acquaintance as strong three beers and does not accept your no when he wants to drive himself rather than leaving it to you to get both home with his car.

As natural consequences, you can point out to him his reduced concentration, decreased decision-making capacity, and the greater accident risk: "If I were you, I would no longer be aware of everything happening on the road, might therefore react to late. And think of everything that could happen then!"

Logical consequences supported by your no are: police penalty (money, minus points), liability in an accident (financial losses, injured persons). "You know this could lead to a penalty for you, and if an accident happens, it is not just a matter of money, but also of persons. A matter of you and me, and probably others."

Experience shows that it may suffice to point out the natural or logical consequences of wrong behaviour or, if it is not too dangerous, to let these happen.

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## Meaningful imposed consequences

In educational settings, in the course of the years I have observed many senseless imposed consequences, with which it was already clear in advance to all concerned that these could not be carried out or maintained, such as a week without television or internet. After two days at most, this consequence would pass into history on its own.

If imposed consequences really are necessary, then these should

- be practically feasible,
- take place at once or very soon,
- not indirectly reinforce behaviour which is of itself not desirable by placing increased value on it, e.g. "No candies for you."
- not impose a negative connotation on positive behaviour, e.g. helping with the washing up.

But let me repeat again: I recommend trusting in the power of persuasion and in the yes to the other and to oneself, and only to reinforce the no with the announcement of consequences when it is absolutely necessary.

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## Back to the example: Driving the car despite three beers

My “no” in this example looks like this:

“I do not think it is right for you to drive now. Three beers would be too much for me.

And you know that I’m not the only one who has concerns when one reaches three beers.

And here you are responsible not only for yourself.

Either you allow me to drive now, or I will take a taxi and send you the bill.”

I say this firmly, at the same time looking the other straight in the eye.

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## My yes to the no

### Offer only brief reasons for the no

For my no, I do not offer more than two reasons, so as to avoid giving the impression that I enjoy knowing more.

The tense situation itself is not a good time to provide reasons. That should be done some other time.

But reasons extend a hand to the other, expressing appreciation: “You deserve an explanation of the reason for my no.”

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**Don't forget**

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*“My observation of what my no actually looks like in practice: weak, unclear, not convinced myself. It showed me that it is hardly a wonder that others do not recognise or accept this no as a real no. This realisation was enlightening and instructive for me.”*

S.B.

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# 3

## My yes to relationships

Figuratively speaking, when I say no, I extend my hand to the other and somehow express that we wish to be, and to continue to be, more than this “no” topic.

... and I do not want to withdraw my hand, even if the other does not agree with my no, or if the other reacts angrily.

The challenge will be to calm oneself down, or at least to remain in the relationship.

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## Sending a positive relational message

Besides the actual message, every communication also contains a relational message, which is transported more on the non-verbal level.

The relational aspect, “What the other thinks of me”, is always heard, even if it is not spoken. And that influences us, without our being aware of it!

The Healing No wishes, on the one hand, to send a good “no” on the factual level, with the positive expectation that my “no” will be effective.

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On the other hand, my “no” wants to send this message on the relational level: I am on your side and I will not allow myself to be separated.

The “no” thus wishes to show solidarity, deepen the relationship, and even overcome distrust.

This is the “supreme goal” of the Healing No.

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## And in the acute stress of the real-life situation?

The first priority is to reduce the tension in the situation:

- take a couple of steps backwards
- establish self-control
- send relaxed non-verbal messages
- do not talk a lot
- if the other says something, listen rather than discuss
- and gradually come closer again

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Actually taking a step backwards does relax the situation, reduces the stress on the other, for the “no” got too close to him.

Possible feelings of rejection can result of what is perceived to be a personal attack, whether you intended that or not.

Taking a step backwards creates space, is a signal for “end of the combat”. And it creates space for you too. And this way you can also establish self-control!

Take a couple of deep breaths. Consciously breathe in and out 3-5 times. Without intending it, at the same time you send relaxing non-verbal messages via your eyes, voice, body posture and gestures. You should certainly reduce eye contact to a few occasions, as a sign of encouragement and of offering a relationship.

And the words? Initially, tolerate remaining silent. If possible, let the other speak first, or speak yourself in very small doses. Whatever happens, avoid discussion, for this means that one of you will be proved right.

But the concern here is not for the factual side, but for the “yes” to the relationship.

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**Only relationship  
which can tolerate  
a no is a real  
relationship.**

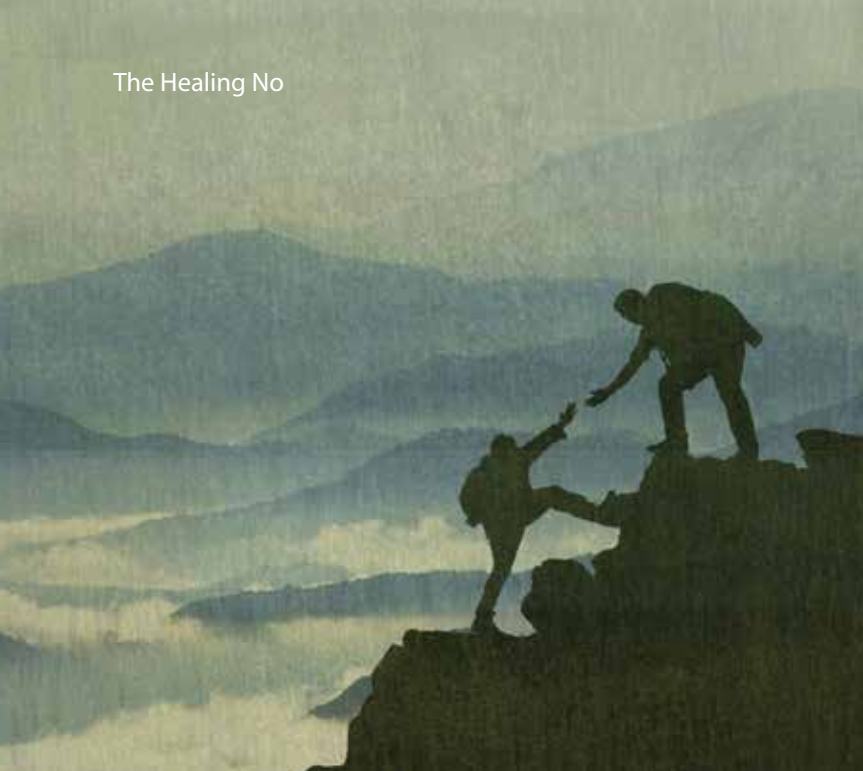
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# 4

## The yes of others to me

There are others who would also say no in this situation. They are for me, (invisibly) backing me up. That constitutes their yes to me.

But I too am for myself: I can say no because I exist! I am no less important than the other.



In a situation where it is very difficult for you to say no, it may be wise to take someone along with you (to support you).

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# 5

## **The yes that says I will be a dependable support to the other**

No matter how the other person behaves, whether he gets angry or acts evasively, I do not allow myself to be separated.

I, who was a kind of aggressor in the eyes of the other, now offer him support, continuing to be on his side and showing him that.

If the other now entrusts himself to me, there is a healing of the mistrust that triggers a no. Trust grows.

This fifth yes cannot always come to fruition, it needs a special space, such as an educational relationship. At work this step is rarely possible.

Comfort is what is needed



*"Peter is furious.  
Friction with his parents yet again..."*

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*... this time at the dinner table! Once again they send him to his room with angry words. There, he is just about to throw everything around. As so often in the past. He is angry, angry with his parents – and angry with himself. He wants to pull himself together! But why do you have to eat lettuce? He does not understand that, when it tastes awful.*

*Peter is tossing his schoolbag into the corner when the door opens and his mother comes into the room. "Now she's about to yell," he thinks, watching her out of the corner of his eye as he pushes his chair aside. "Why is she quiet? Why doesn't she shout or simply go away?"*

*Peter feels confused. That seems unusual to him. When his mother comes closer and lays her hand lightly on his shoulder, he flinches, at first out of fear, then he turns away more out of defiance. "Get out," he snarls.*

*Inwardly, his mother has to fight with disappointment and anger. "Peter!" – she cautiously lays a hand on his shoulder again. This does him good, but inwardly Peter still resists.*

*As his mother draws him closer to her, a struggle breaks out in Peter.*

*How keenly he longs to be close to her. But there is also the mistrust about having to listen to how bad he is. Suddenly he can do nothing except cry and rest his head against her shoulders.*

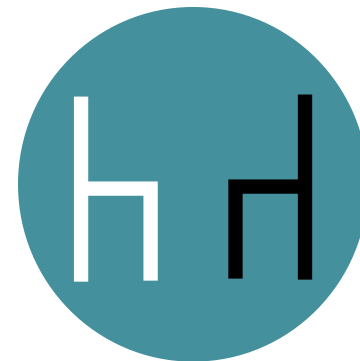
*After some time, the mother starts to talk about how she herself was not able to eat a bite of lettuce as a child. "And how did you manage that?" he asks. "No idea, but today it's no longer a problem for me," replies the mother.*

*Peter straightens up and sees the chaos he has created in his room. "I'll clean it up," he mumbles. "Okay, maybe tonight we can talk about the next time we eat lettuce." His mother strokes his hair again and leaves the room.*

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The so-called fist exercise, which I encourage you to try, clearly illustrates what it means to be on the other person's side.



Two people sit facing each other.

One makes a fist, the other has the task of opening this fist, but without using words and without violence.

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## Typical course of the fist exercise

At first, the “opener” tries to be active, he strokes or tries to move single fingers carefully. The fist does not open, maybe it closes even more.

Now he turns to the whole person, perhaps touches his arm or squeezes his shoulders. But even this brings no results.

Maybe he’s already giving up inside now. The proposal to use force is in the back of his mind.

Or he becomes more creative: he tickles, drops something valuable, so that the other person picks it up... Nothing happens.

He will probably give up now – or he realises that he cannot open this fist, only the other person can, if he wants to.

Now is the opportunity to switch from action to securing, to hold his hand under the fist, offering security, until it opens voluntarily, however long that may take.

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## The fist exercise is an insider tip!

*“Fist opening is a simple and ingenious example of many problems where we try to change situation. It has made me aware that much cannot be re-shaped as I would like it to be. It is important and good to preserve the relationship and not respond admonishingly with a stress-NO – sometimes solutions show up later on – I stay calm, I hold it out, I can see myself as the one who is making plenty of effort, but the result is not primarily dependent on my activity.”*

S.B.

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**One no,  
supported by five yes's,  
can create trust**

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**One no,  
supported by five yes's,  
can create trust**

W., an employee since the previous year, was reminded by the director of her obligations in a case of misconduct.

She responded with allegations that she was not understood and that her relationship with the director was impaired. It is difficult for her to separate and distinguish where she has made a real mistake, where she has to recognise her own responsibility.

The director, as discussion leader, stuck to the fixed boundary, demanding compliance with the obligation, but at the same time showing her how much he appreciated her.

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... The conversation ended with him explaining that the decision still stood, but he was ready to clarify the relationship and, if desired, consider how W. could go about fulfilling her obligations. The next day, he contacted W., a move designed to show that the relationship is still important to him, that he is not against W., but for her.

A week later, W. approached the director and said that something fundamental had happened. Her negative feelings towards him had suddenly evaporated, yes, on the contrary, she now could not prevent herself having positive feelings for him.

W. could break through to trust in this conflict situation because the director was trying to instill confidence and yet speak a clear no.

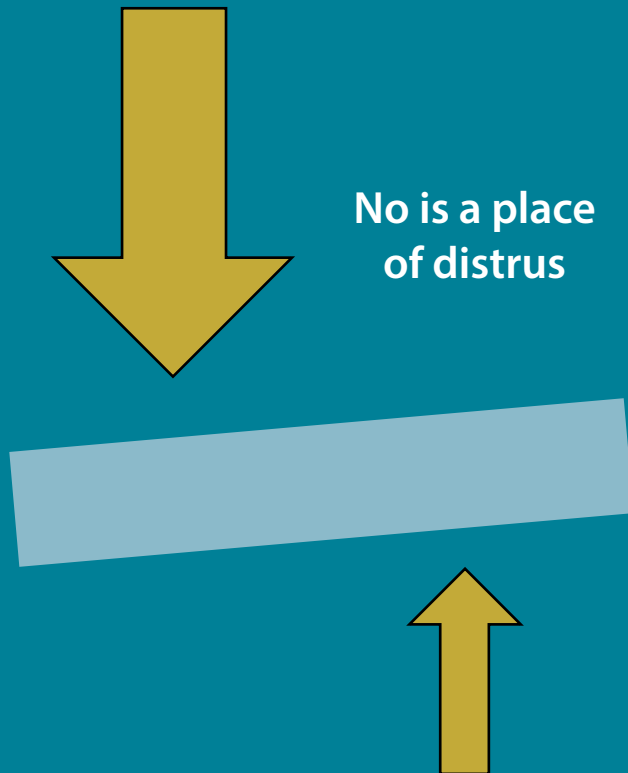
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But one should not conceal  
the price which has to be paid for  
the **Healing No.**

**You will have more trouble in  
your life.**

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## What feelings might arise in a person who encounters a boundary, experiences a no?

- Constriction, frustration: "It is not working the way I want."
- Threat: "The other is against me."
- Rejection: "The other does not want to be with me."
- Inferiority: "I am worth nothing (to him and others)."
- Shame: "I should not be alive!"
- Powerlessness: "Escape!"

His reactions range between resistance, contradiction, eternal discussion, submissive consent, retreat or running away.

## Distrust due to my “no”-biography

How was “no” said to me, as a child, as a teenager...?

Have I sometimes, or even frequently, experienced the no as arbitrary, degrading, or even aggressive?

Could it be that I want to avoid such experiences and therefore it is difficult for me to say no today?

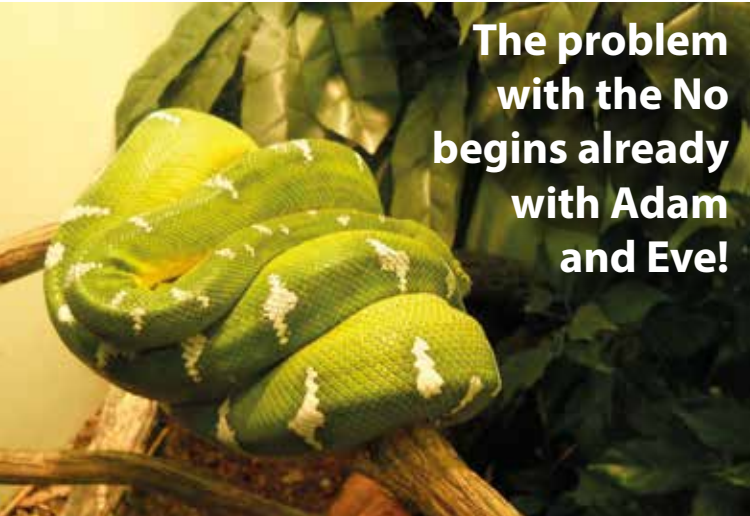
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And when I was the one saying no?

How then did the others behave, especially authority figures?

No-one paid attention? Contempt? Mockery? Violence?

Could it be that I want to avoid such experiences and therefore it is difficult for me to say no today?



**The problem  
with the No  
begins already  
with Adam  
and Eve!**

In the story of Creation in the Bible, we read that even the first No led to problems. The sign over Paradise was God's Yes, it was only over the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that God had spoken his No.

And immediately it was possible for distrust to arise: can it be that God wants to keep something back from us?

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Not only does the problem with the No seem to have something to do with my own life story, but it also seems to be something universal. A worldwide challenge which is solved very differently in different cultures.



We should expect every meaningful No to awaken feelings of distrust in the other person.

---

## The Healing No in an example

The starting point: Someone you know has the reputation of speaking badly of others. He asks you if he can tell you the latest story about a mutual acquaintance.

You know that you do not wish to hear it.

### **How might the stress variant look?**

Your face darkens. Perhaps you are thinking, "This person is impossible!". "No," you exclaim, "I have no wish to know about it." In despair, you attempt to find another topic. You notice how the other person withdraws, inwardly and outwardly. The conversation falls silent.

Now no-one knows how it is to continue. Then the other person does begin to talk about the acquaintance after all. You feel helpless. After you have heard the story, you try to defend the mutual acquaintance, which your discussion partner then uses as an opportunity to tell a further story. Now it finally bursts out of you: "That's enough, this is getting on my nerves." The other person withdraws into himself with the words, "I don't know what's wrong with you."

## And now, with the Healing No?

You are quickly thinking about what you want to do. It is clear to you that you don't like to hear talk about those who are not present. And certainly not when it is negative. You know that the "no" is something good, good for your conversation partner as well, for it means that you will not be speaking negatively about him in his absence either.

So you say this to the other.

And you have already firmly decided that, if such talk does begin, you will tell him that you will go away if he does not stop.

As an alternative topic, you are thinking of telling him something about last weekend.

But your conversation partner simply goes on talking. Now you smile at him and say, "Instead of that, I want to tell you something personal about myself."

But the other still does not stop.

He is probably feeling resentful, or he is ashamed of himself. You lay your hand on his shoulder – you have known each other for a long time, and this is not unusual – and you begin with your story. You notice that his first wish is to draw back, but then he does allow the contact and then not only listens, but soon joined and laughing about your funny story.

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## But it could also continue this way:

Now we imagine that the other pushes your hand away and, getting angry, says, "Whatever I do, it's never right in your eyes."

Now you have to take a deep breath to avoid biting back. You remain silent, cautiously seek eye contact with the other so as to give him a friendly look. And you are prepared to wait until the other has calmed down again. You do not want to let a separation come between you and allow antagonism to arise. Once he appears to have calmed down again, you say, "I enjoy chatting with you". You observe him, his facial expression, his posture and movement, and you ask, after a further pause, whether he would agree to hear your story. The other nods, and you begin. If the agreement is not reluctant, there has probably been a "breakthrough" to trust, part of an inner healing, even if only a small part. If the agreement was more the result of yielding and becoming heated, then at least a step has been made towards trust. But agreement may not be given, because this does not depend on us alone, despite the Healing No.

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## Later, alone:

If you have time to reflect on this, try to understand the other if you want to find your “yes” to the other. Remind yourself that you, too, have on occasions spoken negatively about others, that it simply slipped out.

Also remember that much that is good connects you with your conversation partner.

“Why does he like to do this,” you ask yourself. Perhaps he wants the conversation to become more personal, or is he bored?

You resolve to talk calmly with him about his gossiping on another occasion, for this is of course not the first time.

In addition, you can also feel your yes to yourself again. You feel quite sure about the whole business, because it is clear to you that this is a rule in your society and in your faith. You are not alone in upholding it.

Quite generally, you have learned that having your own opinion does not mean placing yourself above the other.

## Is this familiar?

*“My problem is not necessarily an inability to say ‘no’ at all. Rather, my ‘no’ is often very destructive and I tend to give up relationships too fast and withdraw to a distance after a NO, partly so that I can very soon consider people dead as far as I’m concerned...”*

S.S.



## What are we afraid of if we say no?

- Anger?
  - Disadvantages?
  - Deterioration in the relationship?
  - Separation?
- 

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## ... especially anger!

It seems easier just to say yes and to hope to be loved by everyone and get along without any anger.

But at a later point the anger we want to avoid will probably become a lot more anger than we feared.

Anyone deciding to say no with consistency must expect that there will be anger, even with the Healing No.

But this anger is worth it.

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## Fundamental decision: Accept anger

Anger may arise – even if I do everything right.

I do not want to avoid anger anymore.

The potential win of a no is worth it and it is therefore worth facing the anger!

Yes, this is a high price for a trusting relationship, but it is worth it.



**Bear anger patiently!**

---

## Anger?

At what is our basic attitude towards anger?  
What have we been told about what it is and how to deal with it?



Have we been told that anger is a bad feeling and that joy, for example, is a good one?

And that bad feelings should not exist?

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## Anger – Yes, please

Let's put aside the division into bad and good feelings, because it is more realistic to differentiate between pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Pleasant feelings delight and motivate, unpleasant feelings give warnings and are signals to be careful.

Anger is a feeling signalling that something is wrong. So a valuable feeling!

Anger is basically neither primarily bad nor forbidden.

(Even joy can be thoroughly bad, as in glee over misfortune, or at the wrong time.)

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*“«Saying No means there may be anger!»*

*Yes - you are in the right, and then there is anger; however, it is as with a thunderstorm: afterwards the air is clearer.*

*This stupid addiction to harmony – I still have not got rid of it entirely; but we are, and remain, students – in every way.”*

V.I.

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**Anger as a signal feeling –  
Yes, please!**

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Use times of peace



## Times of peace

Why do we so rarely use times of peace, times in which the “no”-issue is not an issue, to think, to plan, to evaluate, to discuss, to debate...?

Usually we are happy that there is peace and have no wish to be disturbed by raising the topic of the “no”.

But when else are we to find the necessary distance from the problem to talk about it calmly?

Use times of peace



## Use “times of peace” to deepen relationships

- Arrange a time to meet
- Do not beat about the bush, but come to the point: what is it about?
- First, listen: what is the other’s view? This can be very different from what I previously imagined.
- Then my view. The “no”: What is it about? My reasons for the no?
- Understand each other, even if I probably persist in my no.
- Discuss possible consequences.
- Fix agreements or consequences, and how and when we will talk about it again.



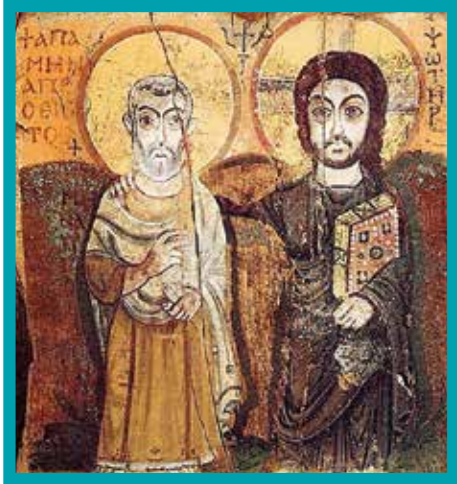
*“Time which we take for ourselves*



*is time  
that gives us something.”*

(Ernst Ferstl)





## The Spirituality of the Healing No

God says “yes” to me

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## God says “yes” to me

- as a person with needs
  - as a person who can make an impact
  - as a person with whom he wishes to have a relationship
-

## Yes to my needs

I have to learn where my limits are: in energy, in acceptable closeness to others, in abilities... Because only then will my relationships and actions not be marked by fear and demanding too much of myself.

To respect myself furthermore means: not only knowing my limits, but also my sources of joy.

---

## I know my limits...



... I also respect my sources  
of joy

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**Self-respect  
strengthens  
our Yes, our Not Yet,  
and our No.**

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*“Yes, how can a person who treats himself badly be good to someone else? So remember: treat yourself to yourself.*

*I do not say: always do that; I do not say: do that often; but I do say: do it now and again.*

*Be there for yourself as well as for everyone else, or at least after everyone else.”*

(Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-1153, wrote this to Pope Eugene II, who had previously lived as a monk in his monastery.)

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Being able to set goals for oneself and thus make a difference; in short:  
Action is part of the human being as created by God.

We experience ourselves as being the cause of effects

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## A special yes to myself: self-efficacy

“I have trust in myself and in my capabilities.”

“When I make an effort, the problems I face can be moved positively.”

“Others believe in me and expect from me only what I can do.”

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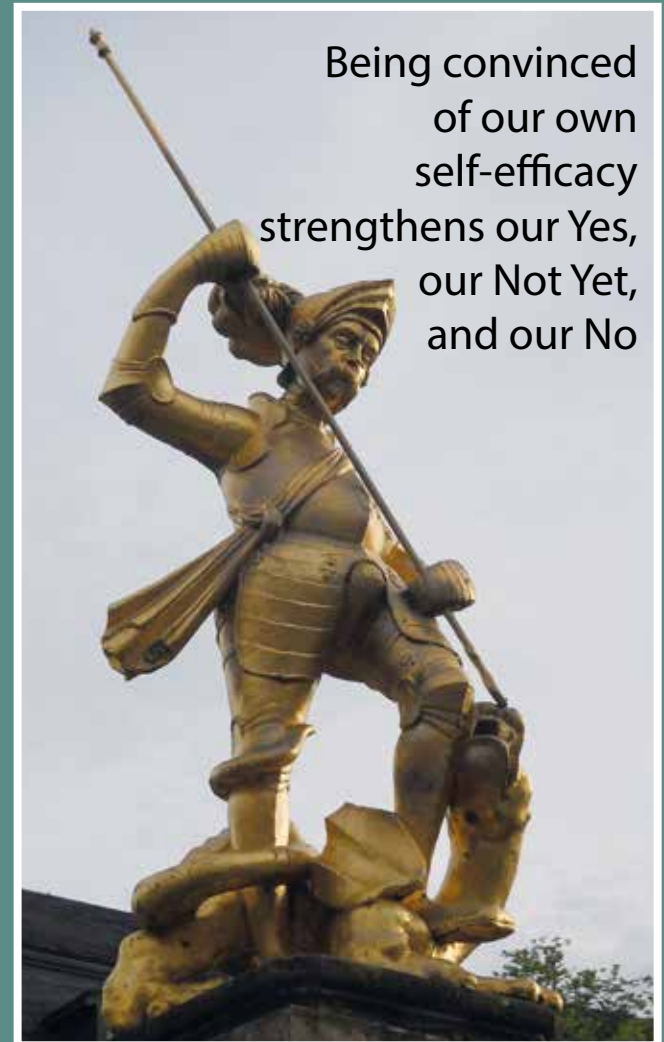
## Self-efficacy with error competence

Self-efficacy is familiar with failures, which are permissible:

I am able to make a difference, but the results are mixed.

Error competence means:

- being able to use mistakes,
  - falling down and getting up again,
  - evaluating mistakes, taking responsibility,
  - having self-confidence that it will work better next time
- 



Being convinced  
of our own  
self-efficacy  
strengthens our Yes,  
our Not Yet,  
and our No



## God's yes to me and my yes to HIM

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*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”*

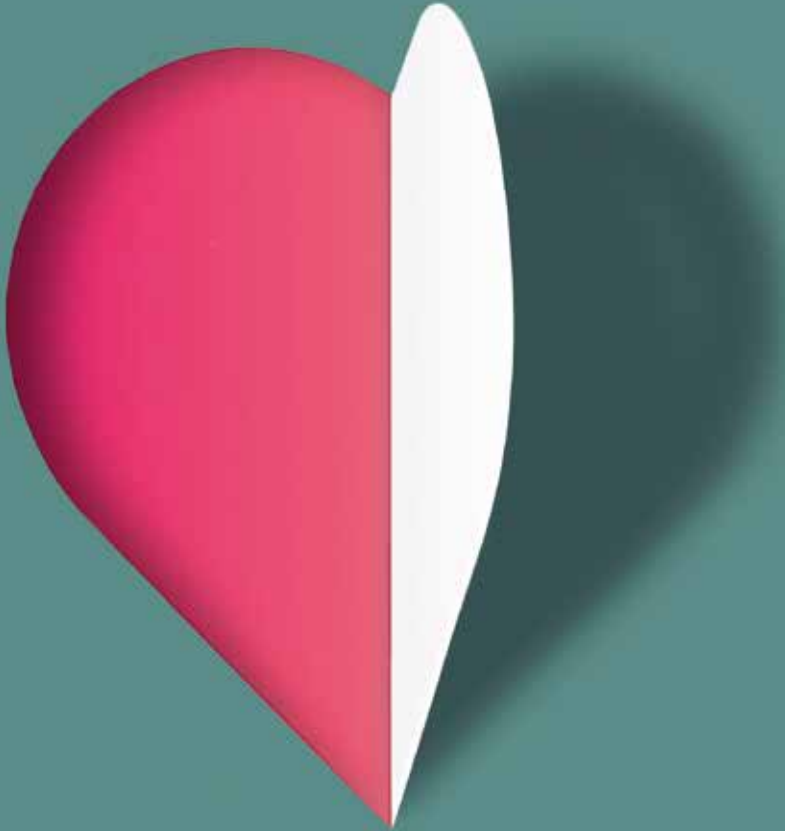
It depends on a lived-out relationship with God. This requires our Yes. Yes, God stands at the door of every human being. And he knocks, not just once. No, often. But only you can open the door.

This door is not completely closed, so I can know what is “lurking” behind it. It has windows (the experiences of others, the Bible, my own experiences) so that I can start to trust, but it is not entirely made of glass. God is waiting for me, yes, he runs out to meet me again and again.

---

## Our commitment:

Nothing will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus...



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... and I trust you, trust that every No and every Yes that you speak to me is good.

---

## God stands behind me, even when he says no

Who stands behind you,  
who guards your back?  
Is it cold there, or hot?

Or does a familiar wind blow there,  
one that cools you and warms you  
as you need it,

bundling together all the good of your years,  
as a vine does with its harvest  
year after year,

like a following wind  
encouraging you  
to the next unknown step?

It does exist, this wind,  
enjoying assuming the face  
of mankind,

but also speaking in its own right:  
Go on. I am on your side,  
I, your God from the very beginning.

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## Without Yes and without No...

- no basic trust in life!
  - no relationship!
  - no person!
  - no freedom to give and take
-



*"Let your yes be a yes,  
your no be a no,  
what goes beyond that is evil."*

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Jesus Christ

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Without No we live in a  
reduced reality.  
Love cannot breathe here.

Without No there is no love.  
Dangers or Always saying yes  
is unloving.

---

## Without Yes and No no trust in each other

The psychologist Petermann (1996) describes trust by applying three criteria:

1. I trust the other person because I believe that he is on my side.
2. I trust him because he tells the truth, he has proved to be reliable.
3. The other person is predictable for me, i.e. his behaviour, his views and beliefs are stable.

We can say that every No and every Yes we hear and say a hundred times in everyday life is precisely one of the important places where trust can grow.

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Reliable Yes + Healing No:

I am alive – we are alive

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## An important challenge for trust

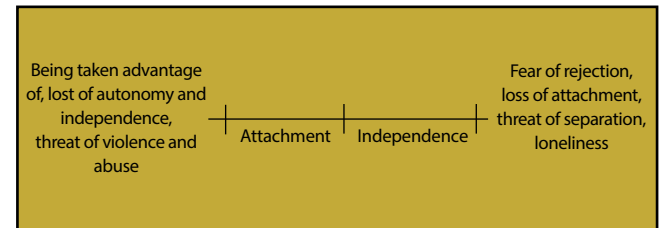
We have to learn to resolve the tension between attachment and independence.

From the Christian point of view, every person is an independent person, who in turn can only develop and live out this independence in relationships.

We have to learn independence without losing relationships, and learn attachment without losing independence

---

The whole thing has a catch:  
Behind both important challenges lie to dangers or fears: If I have too much attachment, I can be taken advantage of or even abused; if I live too independently, I may be abandoned.



Relationships can quickly put us in contact with two basic fears in our hearts:

*Do not leave me!*

*Do not hurt me!*

This is how the Jewish philosopher Emanuel Lévinas (1905-1995) formulated it.

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## Without Yes and without No no relationship!

The great theme, faith and trust versus doubt and mistrust, has been visible in the everyday No since the beginning of human history.

In other words, we cannot do justice to God's commandment to love if the No is not as natural part of love as the Yes.

Always saying yes is unloving; if you cannot say no, you cannot say yes!

Do not forget the Not Yet, but don't use this as an excuse. Make sure you really do use the time this gains!

---

## No and yes are the essential components of a relationship.





### **Provocative thesis:**

Do we perhaps love so little because we cannot say no?  
Because we think that a no is uncaring, that loving means always saying yes?

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### **Without Yes and No no person!**

God is a person – that is an important component of the Christian faith – a person with a will, with freedom, with feelings, with goals and intentions, and we, as his counterparts, as his redeemed counterparts, the same.

If this personhood is to develop, we also need the competence to find identity by setting boundaries.

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**Without Yes and No  
no freedom  
to give and take.**

Setting limits to protect our own needs is hard for us, as already described above.

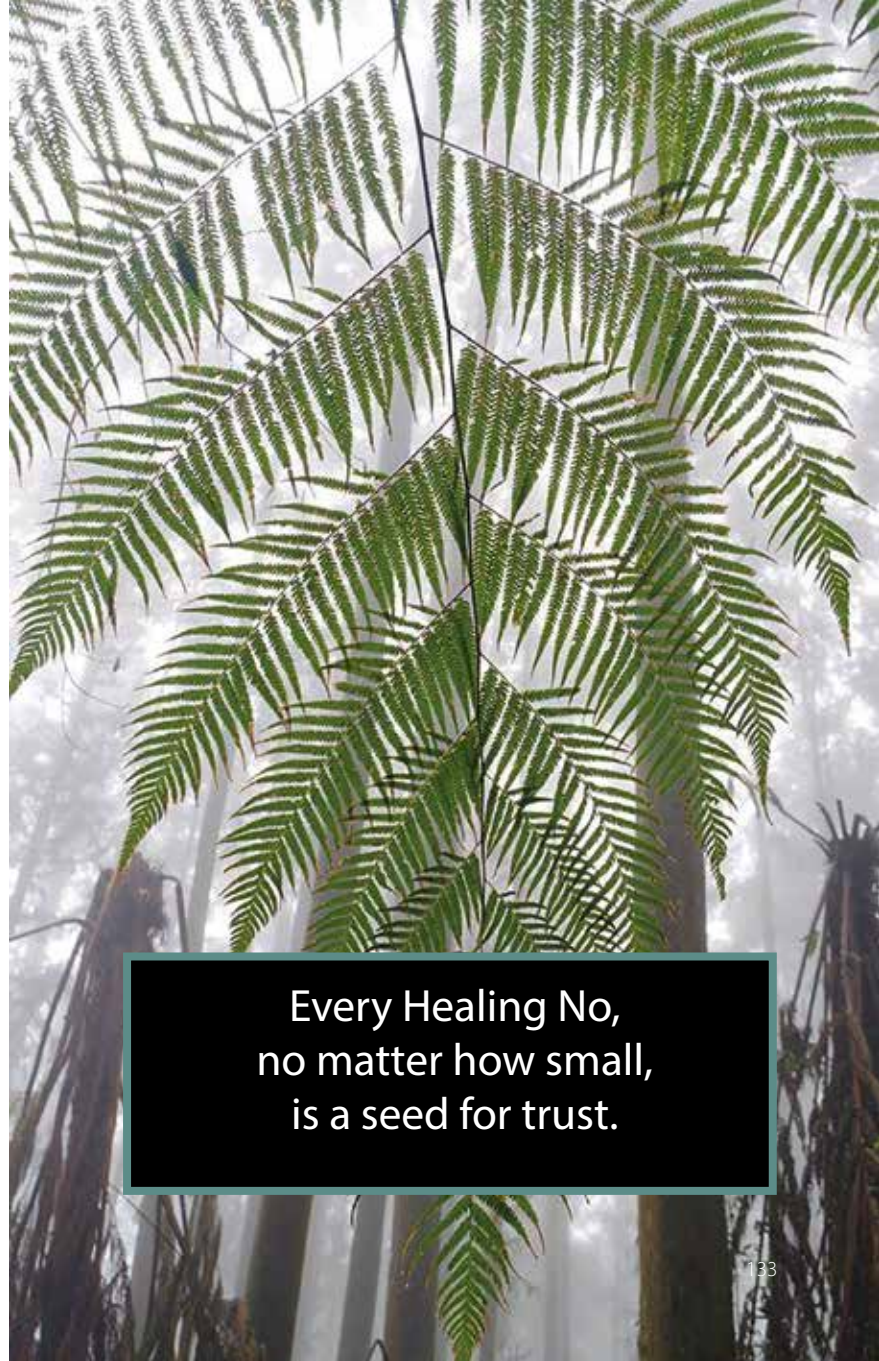
This is linked not only with more or less self-confidence, but also with the courage to stand up for one's own rights and needs, to live them out, to take what one deserves, but also, out of love, to waive rights, to renounce freedom, and to share what belongs to oneself.



**Yes and No:  
I have the right to be!**

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**The Healing No  
deepens  
relationships  
and thus enables trust.**



**Every Healing No,  
no matter how small,  
is a seed for trust.**



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