

ABOUT THE YES AND THE NO'S THAT PRECEDE THEM

By Victor Sanchez

The importance of saying NO is evident in human history.

The big NO of Nelson Mandela in South Africa, who after 27 years of undeserved prison, refused to launch a war against the white minority in power and instead challenged the black majority by saying that there was not a solution without the white people who they believed to be their enemies.

The big NO of Mahatma Gandhi who proposed to stop buying the salt from the English companies and instead march to the ocean to get the salt themselves and started with that the movement which led to the independence of one of the most populated countries on Earth.

The humble but big NO of Rosa Parks who in 1955 was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger in a bus in Alabama, and started with that the civil rights movement against segregation in the United States.

The instances of the importance of big NO's in human history could go on forever. Each of these NO's made room for many incredible important YES that came afterwards.

But what about the big NO's of the everyday little people that will never make it to the books of history?

They certainly change our personal history as well, and since our own individual life is the only one we really get to know and handle, these NO's are extremely important for each of us.

As an example, let me share with you a little story that happened to me years ago with one of my clients, who came to me for a personal retreat, in which he wanted to take a different look at his life. In just a few words I think what he wanted was to simply know what was going wrong in his life to the point that—even though he looked healthy with successful career in civil engineering—he was not happy.

As a part of the process this man—let's call him Edward just to have a name—was sharing with me the outline of his life. Everything seemed fine, he had a career he liked, was making good business, bought a beautiful property in Arizona and built a house to his liking. He loved his home. He also had a partner who he invited to live with him at his house a couple years ago. We will call her Mary. What was not ideal is that they did not share the same kind of likings. For instance, he liked camping, she liked the city. He liked physical activities such as long rides on his bicycles, but Mary did not. He liked to spend time with his friends every now and then, but even though he invited her to go with him, she not only did not go with him, but would press him not to go at all.

Well, all couples have their problems, right? What I was thinking at that point is that perhaps they could benefit from some personal negotiation and perhaps even some couples counseling.

But then he said something that struck my attention. He was talking about what he liked to do at home when we had some free time. He spoke about the pleasure that was for him playing the guitar and singing sometimes. Then he said, "This is of course, when she is not at home." Then I said -what? Can you repeat that? He looked at me with a disconcerted expression on his face, probably caused by my own disconcerted expression. He could not see anything special in what he was saying. This is the dialogue we had:

-Edward, when do you play the guitar?

-When she is not at home.

-Why only then?

-Because Mary does not like noise in the home!

-What? Your guitar playing is just noise for her and, because of that you are not allowed to play the guitar in your own home?

Then he looked at me with astonishment.

Yes... but, is this not normal?

Well... it may be normal to you... but if you ask for my opinion, I would have to say that it is not normal at all. Then he kept quiet and looked reflexive. It felt like a sensitive chord had been stroked. I went on.

-Is it really normal to you? Does that feel right?

- Well, no. Not really.

-Why do you take that?

-Because I don't want to have conflict. I thought that by being nice to her, everything would be all right between us.

-Except that you are not happy, and now you are waiting for her to leave to enjoy your home as you like; the home that took for you years of hard work to build. Is that really all right for you?

He did not answer. He didn't have to. We stayed quiet for a while and then he did what he came to do with me. He dug a tomb, to spend the night "consulting with Mother Earth" about the issues of his life.

In this practice a hole in the ground is dug, for a person to stay comfortably overnight, while the keeper stays nearby around a camp fire playing a ceremonial drum for 15 minutes every hour. A "roof" for the tomb is built of fallen tree branches and a blanket so that the soil to cover the

tomb is not directly in contact with the person. Obviously a good entrance for air is made so that there is good fresh air getting in during the experience. The tomb is dark, quiet and protective. In the tomb an altered state of awareness is achieved and that is how “Mother Earth” takes care of us and gives us advice in the ways of visions, insights or dreams.

The morning after, when Edward came out of his grave ceremony he was renewed. His face looked fresh and full of vitality.

-How did it go?

-It was a beautiful night. I had a lot of dreams and visions. But there is one which stood out. It was a memory of something that actually took place in my life.

-Do you mind to share about it?

-Sure. I dreamed about the time when I had gone to a bicycle race on mountain terrain. I was there with other friends. Mary did not want to go because she said it would be too exhausting. But I went anyway. Not only that, I went and I won the first place in a race that lasted for five days. I was so happy!

-Wow! That is a great accomplishment! What happened next?

-I went home all happy and proud. I had a little trophy with me that I was placing on one of the shelves in the living room. I was just placing it there but then Mary yelled at me –Don’t place that there! It does not go well with our furniture!

-What did you do?

-I put it in the closet.

-Did you dream all that in the tomb? What do you think about it?

-I don’t think. I know.

-What do you know?

-I know it is not right.

That was Edwards’s vision that night. He did not make any promise and yet, as he would share with me months later, he did not return home the same. He came back and said NO. Enough is enough. NO more of being a guest cornered in his own home.

It was not that he stopped loving Mary; it was just that he remembered that he had to love himself too.

From that moment so much changed in his life. Apparently there was not enough flexibility and listening there for the relationship to survive, but he recovered his life, his home and most importantly: he recovered his self-respect.

With his self-respect back, joy for life and healthy energy flow followed. He even later found a more suitable partner.

By looking both at the big historical examples and the big examples of our little lives, I think we can realize that for a big important YES to happen; sometimes we have to cross the doorway of some big NO. And yes, that means some trouble, but what would life be without that kind of trouble?