

The Power of No Summary

By James Altucher

Have you ever heard the phrase, 'No is a complete sentence?' Our lives are becoming cluttered because of our refusal to say no. In a bid to help declutter our lives, and rid ourselves of obligations, James Altucher, and Claudia Azula Altucher provide a helpful guide to set us on the path of health, abundance, and happiness.

The Power of No gives a nod to Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, and delves into why saying "no" gives back our power and freedom. It's not just about granting ourselves *permission* to say no, but embracing the *power* to declare NO. Having a greater sense of what saying no can do, allows us to say yes to the most meaningful things.

The authors share their wisdom and insights into why we shouldn't be frugal with our nos, through compelling anecdotes and life-lessons. There are also exercises to help us get started on the journey of taking control, and learning when to say yes.

Our inability to say no overwhelms us, and adds things to the already growing list of time-consuming tasks. *The Power of No* teaches us to be brave and listen to our anxieties, pain, and suffering. It unpacks the influence of peer pressure, the need to adhere to social norms and expectations, and teaches us to rid ourselves of anything toxic and distracting. We're conditioned to say yes.

This book provides a framework that focuses on serving ourselves, and saying no to anything that harms our creativity and ability to reach our

full potential. We're entitled to lead more meaningful lives and should focus on what we value. We don't need to impress other people, or say yes just because we feel that we have to. Let's briefly look at why saying no, is enough, and how saying it more often might just save our lives.

Choose Life

"Choose life" might remind you of the famous monologue from *Trainspotting*. However, it's also one of the fundamental ideas in the book. The authors argue that saying no more frequently, will literally save our lives.

How often have you pursued a relationship with someone who doesn't feel the same way about you, or is clearly wrong for you? How often have you over-committed to things, or made promises out of obligation?

Maybe you've felt in denial about what your gut feeling is telling you, perhaps you've pushed aside your anxiety, or perhaps you've made yourself crazy with pros and cons lists. Have you ever stopped to think about how quickly we say yes to things, and how many questions we ask ourselves before we commit to saying no?

Saying no takes time, and it also means admitting certain hard truths that we may not want to deal with. However, freeing ourselves of the burden of all the time it takes to say no, and realizing how healthy it is to refuse things, gives us back the power. The lesson is that we need to learn to say no, as quickly as we say yes.

Choosing life is about understanding that nobody has it easy, and that struggle is one of the critical aspects of life. Have you ever thought to

yourself: 'I want to die?'

You might utter these words to yourself in the midst of extreme suffering. The authors suggest that it's at this point that we need to use this to transform and reevaluate our suffering. We should use these moments of suffering to kill old ways of thinking, and see what emerges as a rebirth. For example, say no to things that harm you and cause you hurt. When you choose life, you say goodbye to bad habits that could kill you, toxic people who cause stress, and situations that bring you pain.

An exercise to help us choose life, and maximize joy and happiness, is to rid ourselves of people who bring negative energy into our lives. We're entitled to choose who we let into our lives, and determining who's in our inner circle can help with this. Begin by writing down a list of people who you see at least five times a week. Next, rate how these people make you feel when you interact with them. By assigning each person a score from one to ten, you can ascertain which people to spend more time with, and who to limit contact with.

Finally, be honest with yourself about your behaviors; in particular, look out for any addictive or habitual behaviors that may be causing you harm.

Choose Values

What matters most to you, and do you have a clear sense of your interests?

For many of us, defining our interests can be tricky. The authors suggest a less intimidating approach to this task though. Why not visit your local bookstore or library and browse for a while. You'll find that you naturally

gravitate towards areas that interest you. Perhaps you find yourself browsing cookery books, or books on architecture? Maybe you find yourself thumbing through a copy of *The Histories of the Ancient World*? Wherever you end up looking, this will ultimately shine a light on some of your fundamental interests.

It's essential to have a sense of your interests and values, so that you can tailor your decisions based on whether or not they align. It's a lot easier when you're equipped to say no to things that aren't attuned to your value system, and you can learn to be assertive.

Many of us have said yes to things that don't make us feel authentic, and although our guts might warn us, we often succumb to the pressure and forge ahead. Many of us have been in relationships with people who don't share our values. Values are crucial, and saying yes for the wrong reasons leads to resentment and bitterness. In cases such as these, we find ourselves in lose-lose situations because of how saying yes makes us feel.

Choosing values and prioritizing interests, invites passion into our lives. And, there's no better way to inspire than to exude passion and excitement.

Choose Silence

We live in a culture where everywhere we look, something, or someone, is trying to grab our attention. We're bombarded with advertising, new products to buy, news, gossip, rumors, social media, and so on.

We're given so many choices, and told that we continuously need more

stuff. This is the point where we need to say no to noise.

We believe that things are scarce, but they're not. This belief that we're lacking makes us obsess over accumulating objects and possessions. We need to realize that more doesn't equal more, and that we need to go back to the basics and embrace simplicity. Once we believe that we have enough, we can start focusing on what's truly important. Furthermore, this will allow us the freedom to say no to excess, and say yes to gratitude.

The lesson here is to focus on abundance. The trouble is that we have a "historical scarcity complex," which is guided by the fact that humans have evolved thinking that everything is scarce. Nowadays, we have an abundance of resources, yet we hold onto the fixed belief that resources are scarce, and that we need more of everything.

The authors offer some suggestions to embrace the silence and open the door to a happier, fuller, and more abundant life. It starts with gratitude and believing that the glass isn't just half full, but that it's overflowing. For example, if you're stuck in traffic, instead of moaning about it, focus on the world around you. Notice the infrastructure, the architecture around you, the other people you're surrounded by. Focus on what you're listening to on the radio, and how incredible technology and progress has been.

Listen to other people. One of the most profound messages in the book is to let people finish their sentences. Imagine that it's their last day to live, and truly focus on what they're saying, and give them your full attention.

We also need to listen to ourselves. Try to block out the noise, and listen to your thoughts. If you have a nagging negative thought, shout "no" at it.

Continue to shout no until it goes away. With enough listening and enough persistence and discipline, your negative thoughts will diminish. Listen to your anxiety and pain. Anxiety is how our bodies warn us about toxic people or situations. Why do certain people or situations make you anxious? If you're distracted by too much noise, this blocks out what your body is trying to tell you. So never underestimate the power of silence.

Switch off the things that are causing you pain, and focus instead on the things that make you feel good.

Choose You

It's not what other people want for you; it's what you want for yourself. So say yes to yourself.

We know that getting everything we want doesn't make us happy. Having a sense of purpose and meaning is what makes us happy. Finding our purpose often comes through suffering, as indicated by Siddhartha Gautama's story, better known to us as Buddha.

Siddhartha Gautama chose his own path, and followed his own calling, to create a life that fulfilled him. He experienced and witnessed much suffering, but through this was able to identify his true purpose.

So much of our lives are governed by social norms and expectations. We're expected to go to college, get married, get a good job, buy a house, etc.

But what if we don't want these things? We need to ask ourselves what we want for ourselves. What are the things you really want to do?

Finding our true calling is different from asking ourselves what we crave. Often what we crave isn't actually what we need. Furthermore, usually what we crave has detrimental consequences. For example, we may crave a bigger house. And, while having a roof over our heads is important, having a bigger home may lead to financial problems. Rather than giving in to cravings, adopt an attitude of gratitude. And, rather than saying yes to things, say yes to yourself.

A way to make this easier is to start a gratitude diary, where you focus on everything positive about your life. Start by listing all of your problems, then begin writing a list of ten things you're grateful for each day. These could be things as seemingly insignificant as breathing. The more we get into the habit of gratitude, the more we're able to rid ourselves of things that harm us, and focus on the abundance of things we're grateful for.

Another exercise is what's known as the "alien technique." When you wake up in the morning imagine that you're inhabiting this human body for just 24hrs. Focus on the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of the body, and make decisions based on the idea that everything you're doing is to keep your host body alive. Every choice you make, every yes, and every no, will significantly affect the person's physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellbeing. Notice how you choose to live your life that day, and what you decide to say yes to.

Completing this exercise might change your perspective on things like eating, exercising, meditating, and sleeping.

In Conclusion

The Power of No teaches us to live in the present by saying no to the past and future. It also shows us that learning to give an assertive no, is liberating and gives us agency. Understanding the rationale behind why we make the decisions that we do, and why we jump to say yes, helps us adjust our behavior. One of the crucial adjustments that we need to make is to decide that we need to live life for ourselves, not for other people. We need to say no to trying to impress the people around us, and feeling obligated or guilty into doing things we don't want to.

Choosing to move forwards means saying no to toxic people who bring doubt and negativity into your life. Say no to things that harm you, things that aren't working for you, and beliefs that don't align with your values.

The freedom to say yes allows us to say yes to reinvention, yes to creativity and ideas, yes to following dreams, and yes to small changes that make huge differences. Significant yeses have a ripple effect, so say yes to the right things. Flex your idea muscle, find an abundance of gratitude, embrace silence, and never underestimate the power of sleep.

Above all, choose life.