

# **The Four Agreements Study Guide**

## **The Four Agreements**

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## Summary

“The Four Agreements – A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom” by Don Miguel Ruiz describes a pathway for individuals who have been dominated by the beliefs and dictates of society’s view of what individuals should think, what they should believe and how they should act. The culmination of these concepts is referred to as the planet’s “big dream.” While agreement with this scenario keeps people in line, it also zaps them of their freedom to choose and think, depletes their energy and strips them of their true identity.

Ruiz has developed a pathway that will allow an individual to reclaim the freedom of expression and action, a right that he was born with. As an adult, his identity was lost long ago. While he was a joyful and wild thing when he was a toddler, as he matured he became aware that there were a set of rules—big important rules—that everyone was required to adhere to. Even though he had ideas and thoughts that were not in alignment with the rules of society’s “big dream,” there were no opportunities to opt out, there were no choices.

As a result, the child learned to “act” like what everyone – his parents, his teachers and his clergy – expected him to be. He had to repress his own dreams, and his identity began to blur, fade and disappear. Eventually, the child who has matured into an adult no longer needs to be policed by authority figures to stay on the straight and narrow. He buys into the big dream and has a tacit agreement with the beliefs and values that comprises it.

Based on his family’s devotion to ancient Toltec wisdom, Ruiz has created a solution to this loss of identity and the frustration, fear, pain and sadness that accompanies the struggle to exist with a false identity. He summarizes it into Four Agreements. His thesis is that once a child matures and has agreed with the tenets of the big dream, he has lost his freedom and is existing in a hell on earth. And on the way, he has been mistreated, abused and sentenced to an unsatisfactory life devoid of joy and stripped of freedom and identity.

The punishment is self-inflicted. The individual develops an internal Judge who is harsh and merciless. When the person strays from his pact with the big dream, the Judge sentences him to guilt, blame and shame. The individual who has become a Victim, accepts the punishment because he deserves it. He also accepts the reality that he lives in a hell on earth, finding comfort in the fact that everyone else does, too.

Ruiz acknowledges that it is difficult to leave a lifetime of rules, regulations and restrictions behind. However, breaking the agreement with the big dream and the multitude of minor agreements made over a lifetime and adapting new agreements in their place – agreements that suit the individual – the real person will emerge and this newly liberated person will be able to find truth and happiness. The Four Agreements are: always speak impeccably, don’t take anything personally, don’t make assumptions and always do your best.

By ascribing to Ruiz's antidote to a joyless life of hell on earth and adopting the Four Agreements, the individual will be able to emerge from the abyss and attain freedom, joy, bliss and... heaven on earth.



# Chapter One: Domestication and the Dream of the Planet

## Summary

The main function of the brain is to dream – and it dreams twenty-four hours a day. The reason that dreams seem distorted when we sleep is because there is no logical or material framework present to add linear direction. Our ancestors created a big dream, an outside dream that can be referred to as “the dream of the planet.” This dream is a collection of all the smaller dreams of mankind. This collective dream is one of community, family and humanity. The subcategories of the big dream are society's beliefs, laws, cultures and religions. It contains the means of achieving the dreams of mankind – governments, schools and events.

Man is born with the ability to dream. When a baby is born, it is taught to focus on the outside dream – the dream of the planet, with its rules and restrictions. The teachers are the child's parents, his school and his religion. The child is taught what he should dream about. The brain is conditioned to focus on the elements of the big dream of the planet, placing it in the forefront of his mind.

The benefits of focusing on the big dream is that the child learns how to interact with others, what he should and should not believe; “what is acceptable and not acceptable; what is good and what is bad; what is beautiful and what is ugly; what is right and what is wrong.” (3) All the answers are in the big dream.

Small children agree with everything they are told. They are not developed or mature enough to rebel against or discard the information. This can be referred to as “the domestication of humans.” The process creates our belief system. We learn what a “woman” is and what a “man” is and we learn how to judge others and ourselves. Children and dogs and cats are trained the same way – with a system of reward and punishment. Children yearn to be rewarded and fear punishment. Children transfer the need for attention and acceptance from their parents to their teachers and other adults.

Once a child is trained, he no longer needs the input from authority figures to keep him in line. He self-domesticates and places all his learned beliefs into a Book of Law which becomes his truth. His judgments of himself and others are based on this Book of Law. If he fails to live up to the laws, he feels guilt and shame.

We have learned to live our lives trying to be the person we believe others want us to be. We have a need to be accepted by everyone. We strive for the impossibility of perfection. But our internal Judge reminds us that we are not perfect and we reject and punish ourselves. There is no forgiveness for being imperfect. We judge others by the perfection that we failed to attain. We hide by taking drugs in order to avoid rejection and exposure.



The belief system along with the Judge and Victim within us represents an unending cycle of punishment and guilt and shame. No one has been abused more severely than each of us abuses ourselves. We are vulnerable to suffering at the hands of others because we accept abuse at the same level that we abuse ourselves. If we believe we deserve abuse, mistreatment by others is accepted. Self-love is the antidote to domestic abuse.

#### PRELUDE TO A NEW DREAM

There are countless “agreements” that each of us has made with others. But the most important agreements are those we made with ourselves. In these personal agreements, you have decided who you are, what you feel and believe and how you should behave. These elements comprise your personality. Many such agreements make us suffer. To achieve a joyful existence, you have to break those agreements and claim your individual power. Much energy is zapped from our personal power in making false agreements and struggling to maintain them. Once a person has enough clarity to see the dream he created and admit that he doesn't like it, change can happen. There are four new agreements that can help us create and live in a new dream free of fear and one that doesn't drain our energy. By breaking a debilitating agreement that does not serve you well, the energy you used to create and keep it will return. The transformation can be incredible.

## Analysis

“The Dream of the Planet” is what most people live under. It is the beliefs and values that children learn and carry with them to adulthood. The source of these beliefs includes society, parents, teachers and religion. Often this dream is filled with lies. But the individual has bought into the lies – he has an agreement with this big dream. He lives up to the expectations of the dream and loses himself in the process. The individual “acts” like he is expected to behave and suffers a loss of identity. He becomes a victim and his own judge. To be free and be himself, the individual must break many “agreements” he has with the beliefs of the dream of the planet and seek out new agreements that will allow him to be himself and to find happiness, love and joy.

## Vocabulary

linear, humanity, discriminate, dynamic, domestication, tyranny, promulgated, manifest, mitote, dissipated



# Chapter Two: The First Agreement

## Summary

### Be Impeccable with Your Word

The first new agreement is the most difficult to buy into and to maintain. But once you are able to achieve success, it will be heaven on earth. Being impeccable with your words sounds simple but it is very powerful. Your word is your creative power – a gift from God. It is through your words that you make your intentions known. Your dream, who you are and what you believe are manifest through your words. The word is the most powerful weapon the human has. But there is a cautionary note – your word can create beauty but it can also destroy it.

The misuse of this power can create a living hell. The word can set you free or enslave you more deeply. Hitler led a whole country into hell with the power of his word. His words activated fear in others. Words plant seeds in the minds and hearts of others. It is therefore just as easy to plant the seeds of fear and hatred as it is to plant seeds of hope and love. Words can free others or cast a web of doubt and fear.

Being impeccable means that a person takes responsibility for his words and deeds but he does not judge or blame himself. Self-love brings more love into your life. Being impeccable with your word is using your power, your energy in the pursuit of truth and self-love. By agreeing to be impeccable with your word, you will release the energy and the truth will surface and cleanse you of the emotional toxins that have ruled you.

The power of the word is terribly abused. It is used to inflict blame, to curse, to destroy. We spread our poisonous emotions through it. On a large scale, mankind uses the word to create divisions among races and people and nations. Most importantly, we use the word to confirm the dream of hell. We are aware the havoc that we can wreak with our word. Words can keep others down at one's own level of misery. Whenever we hear a word and have agreement with it, it becomes part of our belief system no matter if the word is true or false. The only way to break the spell of a black magic word is to replace it with a new agreement with truth and beauty.

Being impeccable with the word begins with you. Once you drop the negative words like, "I'm stupid," "I'm ugly" or "I'm fat" and begin using only impeccable words about yourself, the next step is being impeccable in word with others. Impeccability of the word will not only create love, it will immunize you against the black magic words of others. You will no longer be vulnerable to poisonous words of others. When a person is impeccable in word, he is at peace, happy and filled with joy. Now that you have been exposed to the concept and life-changing potentials, nurture the seed of impeccability. Practice. . . tell yourself how wonderful and great you are and that you love yourself. A future of happiness and success awaits you.



## Analysis

Words are powerful and depending on their substance can be both beneficial and detrimental to the individual. When an individual makes an agreement to be impeccable with his word, he strives to find the truth and speak only the truth. Words are magic and express who a person is and what he strives for. Speaking impeccably of oneself and for others will create love and safeguard the individual against the black magic of poisonous words that are intended to inflict pain and force an individual to revert to his old agreement with the big dream that didn't work for him and never will.

## Vocabulary

impeccable, transcend, manifest, enslave, atrocious, perpetuate, analogy, pompous, pervert, contagious, immunity, transcend





# Chapter Three: The Second Agreement

## Summary

### Don't Take Anything Personally

The first agreement spawns the other three agreements. With your new-found power of impeccability the poisonous words of others can roll off your back. Once you agree to the negative words of others, then it is part of you. When a person takes another's words personally, he has agreement with those words. "Personal importance" is a trap – a false trap that says that everything in the world is about "me." When we take the words of others personally, we are making a concession that others know our world better than we do.

An unhappy person who tries to insult you is just trying to make his own misery seem more bearable. Taking things personally makes a person easy prey to the poison of others. The gift of this agreement is that you are immune to this poison. By defending yourself and creating a conflict, you begin to spew your own poison. Let go of the need to justify yourself or always be right. What matters is the agreements you have with yourself not the black magic of others. A person who has healthy agreements with himself is not affected by the words of others.

When a person is hurt by another's words, it is not the words that cause the pain – it is the wounds that the person already has and that still hurt. One's own point of view is what matters. The other person has another point of view and it has nothing to do with your reality. If you have love in your life – self-love – there is not room for the negativity of others.

Don't even take words that suddenly pop into your own mind personally. They could be negative words that you heard from someone else and are just surfacing in your mind. These "voices" are called "Allies by the Toltec and Gods in other cultures. The mind is complex and exists in more than one dimension. You might have an idea that is not your own – it came from another source in the data that your mind processes. These new thoughts or concepts can be accepted or rejected and should not be taken personally. Part of your mind can speak to another part of your mind. A bunch of voices in your head is the fog or mitote mentioned earlier. These voices with ideas and opinions can be speaking all at once and cause utter chaos and confusion. They can lead the individual to doubt his values and the agreements he made because they are in conflict with them. By keeping a close inventory of the agreements you make with yourself order can be restored.

By taking things personally you are making yourself vulnerable to suffering. We are all addicted to suffering at one level or another. If we have a need to be abused, there will be someone there to accommodate that need. Be discriminating and don't believe what others say. You have the right to believe it or discard it. People strike out and tell lies to



hurt you because they are hurting themselves. If you keep the agreement of not taking the words of others personally, their words will have no impact on you. They are acting out of fear.

If a person does not treat you with love and respect, it is a gift when they walk away. A person must believe in himself and his values and decide when it is the right time to walk away from a person who is in pain and trying to bring him down, too. Not taking things personally will free you from envy, anger and jealousy. By taking on the agreement to not take anything personally, those negative little agreements that you've been burdened with for a lifetime will dissipate. By keeping this agreement, you will be free to live a life of joy and love.

## **Analysis**

The second agreement is to never take anything personally. Once a person finds the truth and speaks impeccably, he has power over the hurtful words of others. It is only natural for a person to be wounded by cruel and unkind words but they can never hurt a person when he doesn't take them personally. A person who spews abusive language and accusations is hurting and his cruel words are just a manifestation of his own miserable state. He wants to pull others down with him and uses the black magic power of his words to do so. But if others don't take the ugly words personally, they have no power over them.

## **Vocabulary**

clairvoyant, Toltec, compatible, justification, ridiculed



# Chapter Four: The Third Agreement

## Summary

### Don't Make Assumptions

When we make assumptions, it is a trap. We tend to believe our assumptions represent the truth. The big false dream is based on people taking things personally and making assumptions. Fear drives us to make assumptions. We don't want to confirm that we're stupid and ask a "dumb" question for clarification. We make an assumption to fill that void and avoid perceived exposure. "Assumptions set us up for suffering." (65)

The brain fog, or mitote chaos, leads us to see and hear only what we want to see and hear. Dreams are destroyed when they are based on assumptions. When the truth is revealed the dreamer is devastated. Making assumptions about your relationship can strike a fatal blow. The parties each assume what the others think and believe they are in agreement with each other. They know each other so well that they feel they don't have to communicate. When things fall apart, they are shocked by the reality of one another. Assumptions in a relationship lead to anger and misunderstanding.

If we don't understand another person's point of view, we often assign a meaning to it rather than ask for clarification. The relationship is presumably so close that words aren't needed. If a couple is in love, they each know what the other is thinking. But that's a big mistake which leads to the end of a relationship. No matter how close the relationship, we cannot assume that others see the world as we do and think and feel as we do.

We make assumptions about our own abilities to succeed or fail because we don't do the homework to actually delve into an issue and be honest about our capabilities. People often enter into a relationship with someone they want to love. They love some things about the person but there are other things they don't like at all. They make the assumption that their love for the other person will change him or her. But change doesn't happen unless the individual wants to change. When the masks come off, the person is hurt that the other person didn't change feeling that his love was rejected. True love is accepted others just as they are. Relationships have a better chance if they are comprised of people who accept each other and have similar values and beliefs.

The way to avoid the pain caused by misunderstanding based on assumptions is to communicate – ask questions without fear of looking ungrateful, unloving or "stupid." Once you hear the other person's truth, there is no need to make further assumptions. The other person's response becomes reality whether you like the response or not. Your word becomes impeccable once you no longer feel the need to make assumptions. All your relationships will benefit.



Become aware of your assumption-making habits – we all have them. Once you face this reality, you will become more aware of them and be able to more easily abandon them and you are well on your way to personal freedom.

## **Analysis**

People fill in missing data with assumptions. Soon the assumptions become reality to them. Rather than ask for clarification and appear “stupid” to others, many individuals get into the habit of making assumptions. Assumptions are often wrong and lead to misunderstandings, hurt and pain. The third agreement is to not make assumptions. Finding the truth and living the truth will benefit the individual and all his relationships.

## **Vocabulary**

assumptions, clarification, amplified, mastery



# Chapter Five: The Fourth Agreement

## Summary

### Always Do Your Best

The last of the four agreements allows the first three agreements to become habits in your daily life. Always doing your best is good advice but remember that doing your best can vary from situation to situation. You will not always be able to achieve perfection but don't feel ashamed or guilty about it because you are doing your best in any given situation. Your emotions, your health, your lack of sleep all play into your level of success. As you focus on doing your best, over time you will enjoy a higher level of success.

Let things come naturally. By trying too hard to do your best, you will expend too much energy and become frustrated and disappointed when you don't attain your goals. If you do your best in any given situation, there is no need for guilt or regrets.

By doing your best you will enjoy a more joyful and peaceful existence. You will be more productive and your personal relationships will all benefit. Don't take actions for "rewards." Take action because you want to. When people live their lives for rewards and don't receive what they expect, they may turn to drugs or alcohol as their "reward." Rewards will come naturally when you take actions that you want to take and that are positive for you.

When you accept the reality that you are doing your best, you are immune to the Judge within who is always looking to blame you and make you feel guilty. You are also resistant to others who speak from their own poison and tell you that you are not doing your best. By agreeing to do your best, you can improve because you will allow yourself mistakes and be able to learn from them. Make "doing your best" part of your daily routine. It will become part of you.

The best way to tell God that you love him is to do your best. And the best way to thank God is to let go of the past and live in the present. Letting go of the past is the only way to live in the present. Above all, you were born with the right to be yourself, make decisions, enjoy life and take risks. And you can only be yourself when you do your best in all situations. You don't need the acceptance of others to attain your personal best. By always doing your best, the other agreements will be easier to keep. There will be occasions when you still make assumptions and take things personally, but with practice those times will become infrequent.

If you seek self-love and personal freedom, you will find it. Being good to yourself, mind and body, is a communion between you and God. Ultimately, every action you take and every thought you have honors God. If you keep your four agreements, you will have a beautiful life. The Toltec referred to this process as the mastery of transformation. After



vowing to honor the four agreements, remember that there are always obstacles along the way. Be prepared for them and don't let them defeat you. Defend your agreements and don't allow anything to throw you off track.

The Toltec teach that the reward from transcending from the hell created by the big dream is the embodiment of God. You will fail at times on your journey but pick yourself up and keep going. Each time you have to get up will be easier than the last. Don't allow the Judge to dominate you and make you the victim. Rate success on a daily basis. If you fail one day, look to succeeding the next. Stay in the present and always do your best.

## **Analysis**

The fourth and final agreement is to always do your personal best. The "best" is different in every case. When a person's energy is spent on worry and guilt, he doesn't have enough juice left to do his best. By discarding negative emotions like anger and shame, a person can focus on doing his best. He doesn't have to do better than his friends or family members, he only has to do his best. By focusing on doing one's best, the individual is able to more easily embrace the other new agreements into his life.

## **Vocabulary**

transcend, ritual, mantras, puja, nurture, philosophical, divinity, communion, manifestation, sabotage, embodiment



# Chapter Six: The Toltec Path to Freedom

## Summary

### Breaking Old Agreements

Everyone talks about freedom and fighting for it. Even in a free society like America, we are not free to be ourselves. Although we blame others for not being allowed to be ourselves, they are not the culprits. It is the individual who keeps him from being himself. He has bought into the big dream and agreed with its beliefs and values.

Little children, four and under, are themselves. They are wild and liberated like flowers and or forest animals. And they are usually happy. If their basic needs are met, they have no worried about the past or future. They live in the present moment. They are fearless – they have no internal Judge yet who controls them and frightens them into being someone else. They are not afraid to love or express themselves. But we lose the freedom we had when we were very young when the Judge and Victim become part of our existence. The belief system that we come to adopt keeps us from being who we are.

There comes a time when it is time to stop blaming and feeling guilty and ashamed and rid your life of the abuse inflicted by others and by yourself. It is time to break old agreements and adopt new ones. You can ultimately return to that happy child you once were. But there is something different about returning to this childlike happiness. Adults have responsibilities.

We can choose to continue to live under the parasitic Judge and Victim system or we can rebel like a teenager and say, “No!” The shamanic cultures of the Americas call themselves warriors because they are fighting against old and toxic beliefs. Being a warrior against the parasite allows us to transcend the big dream of the planet and create our own dream. We can create our own heaven and discard the hell that we formerly existed in. Destroying the parasite requires facing and dealing with one fear after the other and it is the only pathway to freedom. Gaining control of our emotions will starve the parasite. Some cultures teach the initiation of the dead which is a symbolic slaying of the parasite without harming the person.

### The Art of Transformation: The Dream of the Second Attention

The dream of the first attention is the process of domestication – being taught to believe in the big dream and agree to its beliefs. By focusing on those old beliefs and lies, you can change the agreements a process which is referred to as the dream of the second attention. The difference between the first and second agreement is that in making the second agreement, you are no longer innocent but you are able to choose in what you believe in.



For every agreement you break you must replace it with one that will make you happy. You must displace the old one because it can come back if there if the empty space remains. You have been under domestication for many years. In a sense, they are like an addiction. It will take time to leave it all behind and there will be relapses. Practice makes perfect. Repeating your new agreements over and over will help you embrace them.

### The Discipline of the Warrior: Controlling Your Own Behavior

Each person faces the new day with a specific amount of energy. You need energy to make the transition to your new agreements. If you spend your day angry and arguing, you will deplete your energy and have nothing left for the hard work of transformation. When you're sad or angry, you see the world through those filters. Everything will be distorted and you will be vulnerable to allow the old agreements to regain power. Old wounds reopen and we respond in poisonous ways.

People's minds are filled with fear. When the fear overwhelms the individual, it leads to mental illness. Psychotic behavior occurs when old wounds are opened. Truth will open old wounds, too. But truth will extract the poison and heal the wound. Forgiving others is a step toward healing. Forgiving others for their missteps allows you to grow and transform.

The characteristics of warriors are universal. The warrior has awareness and discipline both of which allows him to be himself. The warrior also has control over his emotions. While the victim represses his emotions the warrior refrains from evoking them. Warriors have control over their emotions and behavior and are impeccable.

### The Initiation of the Dead: Embracing the Angel of Death

We can learn a lesson from the angel of death. We all only have a limited time to live. We can choose to lament it or enjoy what we are doing. Death also reminds us to be ourselves because there is only a slim window of opportunity to do so. Live every day as though it were the last one you will live. It also compels us to treat others with love because we don't know how long we will have them.

The big dream that you lived under will also die when you decide to live the rest of your life as yourself and enjoy every minute that remains. It is a fight to the death because the Judge and Victim don't really want to die. But you will be victorious over them by ceasing to nourish them. The Toltec teach that the angel of death comes to us to remind us how temporary our state is. The angel of death takes the past away and allows us to create new dreams and to live in the present.

## Analysis

By breaking old agreements and taking on the Four Agreements or other new agreements that specifically suit the individual, peace, love and a blissful life can be attained. The ancient Toltec became masters of their dreams, finders of their own truths





and warriors against the poison of the old and discarded agreements. To the Toltec, the old belief system is a parasite that controls the mind and body. The parasite is nurtured by fear and suffering. The Toltec warriors fought against the parasite by reinforcing their new dreams in real life and by starving the parasites of the anger and hatred that they needed to survive.

## Vocabulary

tyranny, masterpiece, consequences, encompasses, shamanic, whimsical, succumb, esoteric, perception, dysfunctional, psychotic, resurrection



# Chapter Seven: The New Dream

## Summary

Heaven to Earth

Each person has the power to create his own hell or his own heaven. Using your imagination will allow many wonderful things to happen in your life. You can be in a constant state of bliss and see everything through the filter of love. You can see love everywhere even in the faces of sad and angry people. See yourself living a life of joy. Perceive an existence free of fear and without guilt or the need to justify your beliefs or actions. You have no fear of being judged because you won't allow it. You have abandoned any need to control others and you will not allow others to control you. It is your choice to live a life of joy and love. Only love will lead to a state of bliss.

Heaven on earth is possible. Moses called it the Promised Land, Buddha called it Nirvana and Jesus called it Heaven. The Toltec named it a New Dream.

## Analysis

By adhering to the Four Agreements or other agreements that are truthful and positive, the individual can attain a state of bliss. He can transcend from the hell on earth that others live in to a real heaven on earth.

## Vocabulary

Nirvana, parasite, Promised Land



# Important People

## Toltec

Don Miguel Ruiz's solution to turn a miserable existence into a life of joy and bliss is based on the wisdom of the ancient Toltec. Thousands of years ago, the Toltec were known in Mexico as "women and men of knowledge." The Toltec was an advanced society that produced many artists and scientists. They established a society that was devoted to conduct research on spiritual knowledge and the rituals and practices of ancient ancestors. Because of outside pressures, the Toltec were forced to conduct much of their work in secrecy. Several apprentices misused the knowledge that was gained, compelling the Toltec to keep their discoveries secret.

Although it was veiled in secrecy over the years, their wisdom was passed along to young generations through several lineages. Ruiz is a descendent of one of these familial lines. Feeling that the world needed to be enlightened about the wisdom of the Toltec, Ruiz decided to share their findings on a broad scale. He devised the Four Agreements based on Toltec teachings and had his work published for all to see.

Although Toltec knowledge embraces the spirit, it is not a religion; rather, it is a way of life. The fundamental belief of the ancient Toltec is that heaven on earth is possible and the means to attain such bliss is through the New Dream.

## God

God is the focal point of the Four Agreements and it is God that makes everything possible. The happiness and bliss that one seeks is found in the embodiment of God. The power of the word, the impeccable word, is stressed in this work. Ruiz speaks about the impact of words and asserts that it is man's creative power and that it is a gift directly from God.

One of the Four Agreements is doing "your best." And it is through doing your best that tells God that you love him. The best way to thank God for all your blessings and newfound bliss is to discard the past and live in the present. By attaining truth, beauty and self-love you will be in communion with God. Ultimately, every action you take and every thought you have honors God. It is Toltec wisdom that proclaims that the reward of transcending from the hell created by the dream of the planet is being at one with God. And it is the energy of God that makes the transformation possible.

To be free of the past, an individual going through the transformation from the old agreements to the new ones needs to apologize for his past ways. He is truly free when he apologizes to his family and friends and even to God.



## **Don Miguel Ruiz**

Don Miguel Ruiz, author of “The Four Agreements – A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom,” was born into a family of healers in rural Mexico. Ruiz became a surgeon but later in life returned to the family’s tradition of devotion to the ancient wisdom of the Toltec, which much of his book is based upon.

## **Moses**

The life of bliss and heaven on earth that Ruiz describe as attainable was referred to as the Promised Land by Moses.

## **Jesus**

The life of bliss and heaven on earth that Ruiz describe as attainable was referred to as the Heaven by Jesus.

## **Buddha**

The life of bliss and heaven on earth that Ruiz describe as attainable was referred to as Nirvana by Buddha.

## **The Warrior**

Those who strive to break away from their agreement with the big dream are called warriors. A warrior has awareness, discipline and control over his emotions. They speak impeccably.



## Objects/Places

### The Dream of the Planet

Long ago, society created the “dream of the planet.” This dream contains the values, beliefs and behavior that are acceptable to society. People are compelled to agree with the tenets of the big dream resulting in a loss of freedom and personal identity.

### The Four Agreements

The Four Agreements that can free man from the limitations of society’s big dream are: be impeccable with your word; don’t take things personally; don’t make presumptions; and, always do your best.

### The Judge

Each individual has a harsh Judge within him who punishes the individual who strays from the requirements of the big dream. The Judge sentences the individual to guilt, shame and blame.

### The Victim

While the Judge inflicts punishment, the Victim within us accepts his sentence. He has not adhered to the beliefs and values of the big dream and therefore recognizes that he deserves to feel sad and miserable.

### The Book of Law

A child is trained by his parents, teachers and church how he should believe and behave. Once he has internalized what is required of him, he no longer needs the input from authority figures to keep him in line. He self-domesticates and places all his learned beliefs into a Book of Law which becomes his truth. His judgments of himself and others are based on this Book of Law.

### Puja

Puja is the Indian rite in which worshipers honor idols that represent God in many different forms. They chant and perform various rituals, all of which proclaim their love for God.



## **Mitote**

The big mitote in the human mind creates a fog of chaos which causes the individual to misinterpret and misunderstand everything. This fog allows us to see only what we want to see, and hear only what we want to hear.

## **The Impeccable Word**

Speaking with the impeccable word is speaking only truth and beauty. Impeccable words are not based on emotions such as anger, resentment, jealousy, envy or sadness.

## **The Initiation of the Dead**

The prospect of death reminds the individual of his limited time on earth. It compels the individual to seek joy and love while he can and to bring love to others while they are still on earth.

## **The Dream of the Second Attention**

The dream of the first attention is the process of buying into the big dream and adhering to it. The dream of the second attention is abandoning old beliefs and lies and choosing new agreements that are suited to the individual in his quest to find bliss and heaven on earth.



# Themes

## Freedom

A strong theme in “The Four Agreements” by Don Miguel Ruiz is freedom. In fact, personal freedom is the ultimate goal of buy-in to the Four Agreements that Ruiz describes as the elements that will enable the individual to attain it. The freedom that Ruiz refers to is liberation from the “big dream” that society created and that is reinforced by parents, teachers and the clergy.

The values and beliefs that society’s big dream is comprised of provide what a person should believe and how he should behave. While children are born free and are like wild things until they begin to mature and realize that there are limitations and restrictions to their freedom. They become aware that there is an accepted way to present themselves and they begin to “act” that way even though it isn’t heartfelt. As the child develops he abandons his younger, “wild” and free self and becomes an acceptable member of society. He has formed a tacit agreement with the tenets of the big dream. By doing so he has abandoned his spirit and his true self. He is no longer free to be himself, and he matures in a forced, manufactured way.

The Four Agreements teaches that an individual can regain that raw freedom that he was born with. By rejected society’s big dream, he will be liberated and can form new agreements – agreements that suit him personally and allows him to be himself. By regaining his God-given freedom, the individual can go on to attain higher and higher goals – those of love, bliss and Heaven on earth.

## Self-Identification

When individuals live under the oppression of the dream of the planet – society’s guidelines for living an acceptable existence – the real personality and identity of the person is repressed, fades away and eventually disappears. The individual learns as a very young child that he must behave and think a certain way. When he doesn’t he is punished and corrected by adult authority figures including his parents, teachers and the clergy.

Eventually, he no longer needs to be policed about his conformance. He develops a Book of Laws that he abides by himself. He also develops an internal Judge who metes out punishment when he falls short of compliance. The individual becomes a sad, depressed, and fearful victim and the identity he was born with is gone.

Human beings who are not allowed to be themselves suffer their entire lives. There is a nagging within that they can’t avoid or rid themselves of. It is their real self yearning to get out and express itself. In the process of adopting new ways of approaching life – in this case the Four Agreements – the individual has the ability to reclaim that lost self. Once the personality is freed from the chains of beliefs and values that are not his and



that were thrust upon him, the real identity of the person begins to emerge. The individual then is free to explore his own needs and desires and to form his own beliefs and values.

## Death

Although “Death” does not seem to be a fitting theme for a practical guide to personal freedom and bliss, in the world of the Toltec it does have an important role. More than a goal, death is accepted as a reality because there is no way for a sane person to do so. But in the positive world of the Four Agreements, death is embraced and has a useful purpose.

Death can enlighten the individual. Mankind can learn a valuable lesson from the angel of death. Despite the fact that most everyone seeks longevity, human life is not very long. We have a limited time on earth to “do our thing” and then it’s on to the next phase the universe has prepared for us. So with the brief time we have, we can make choices. We can pity ourselves and our fellow man knowing that time is running out or we can, as the Fourth Agreement ascribes to, do our best with it.

The specter of death is always there, hiding in the shadows and ready to pounce. If we choose to take the right attitude about death, we can use it in a beneficial way. It’s always there to remind us that we should make the most of the time we have left. It warns us to be ourselves because that slim window of opportunity to finally find ourselves is tick-tocking away. Death tells us to live every day, every hour as ourselves and to make the best of it. One day death will emerge from the corner and its smile will have disappeared. Death also urges us to treat others well, especially our loved ones. Their time is just as short as our own. If we allow it to, the angel of death takes the past away and allows us to create new dreams and to live joyfully in the present.





# Styles

## Structure

“The Four Agreements – A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom” by Don Miguel Ruiz has seven chapters that lay out the guideline to self-identity and freedom in an orderly and logical manner. This structure makes for easy understanding of the tenets that Ruiz poses to the reader. He first explains what the “Dream of the Planet” or society’s idea of what is acceptable and then provides a remedy to a system that produces sad, confused and fearful individuals.

Ruiz’s pathway to freedom and bliss discards the “Dream of the Planet” and replaces it with agreements that will replace poisonous emotions with custom agreements that will meet the need of the individual and allow the real person who had been lost and nearly forgotten to emerge. In the end the new agreements will lead to a communion with God and the chance to live in bliss in a heaven on earth.

Preceding the first chapter is a section entitled, “The Toltec.” Ruiz explains the source of many of his ideas tracing it to the wisdom and knowledge of the spiritual Toltec culture that existed over a thousand years ago in Mexico. Following the final chapter is a section entitled, “Prayers.” Included in this section are prayers for love and for freedom. There is a short bio of the author that describes his family as a long-time spiritual one dedicated to healing and teaching. He broke out from that mold and became a physician and surgeon. But a near-death accident renewed his interest in the spiritual world returning him to the family tradition.

## Perspective

“The Four Agreements” by Don Miguel Ruiz is based on the real life experiences of the author and on the traditions and wisdom of his family on the Toltec society which was a culture of Mexican men and woman who were known for their intelligence and knowledge. From his first memories, Ruiz was exposed to many of the theories and concepts that he espouses to in this “practical guide to personal freedom.” Ruiz’s father was shaman and his mother was a healer.

The family, of course, assumed that Ruiz would follow in the family’s footsteps and pursue a career in faith healing and teaching. However, Ruiz got caught up with the modern world and pursued a career as a physician and surgeon. A near-death experience occurred when he was involved in a serious accident after falling asleep at the wheel. That experience made him look within and begin to reassess his value system.

In his spiritual reawakening, he began to study the Toltec society which had roots in his family. He threw himself into his study and became an expert with their teachings and



was inspired to pass on his knowledge. One of the results was “The Four Agreements” a guide to personal freedom which he follows religiously.

## Tone

“The Four Agreements” by Don Miguel Ruiz is written in a casual and gentle style. Although the subject matter addresses issues that many self-help books focus on, this work is not over-burdened with unfamiliar psychological terms, otherwise known as psycho-babble. The term “agreements” in this “guide to personal freedom” has a slightly different meaning than what is commonly accepted. The agreements that Ruiz refers to are agreements with self that will lead to the personal freedom he promises.

Ruiz often refers to being “impeccable.” His meaning of this word includes the purity that it implies but he adds an additional dimension to the word by including it to mean that a person must always speak impeccably – must always tell the truth, his or her truth. He frequently refers to the “dream of the planet” which he defines in a simplistic manner as the reality that society expects of each individual. He speaks of destroying that false reality and coming to terms with one’s own reality from which he can derive his own personal dream. He refers to the wisdom of his family in the Toltec tradition. The Toltec culture goes back thousands of years to a tribe of Mexican men and women who were known for their wisdom.

Don Miguel Ruiz’s overall tone is gentle not aggressive and consistent but free of any reproach or warnings of dire consequences should the reader not adhere to The Four Agreements.

# Quotes

What you are seeing and hearing right now is nothing but a dream. You are dreaming right now in this moment. You are dreaming with the brain awake.

-- Author (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 1)

**Importance:** The premise of this non-fiction work is the dominance and power of dreaming.

All of humanity is searching for truth, justice, and beauty. We are on an eternal search for the truth because we only believe in the lies we have stored in our mind.

-- Author (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 15)

**Importance:** This passage captures the essence of the author's thesis. Man is taught and has agreed to a belief system that is based on lies, yet the human spirit seeks to escape and seek his own truth.

All the magic you possess is based on your word. Your word is pure magic, and misuse of your word is black magic.

-- Author (Chapter 2 paragraph Page 27)

**Importance:** The most powerful weapon a person has is his word. This quote stresses the importance of words being used carefully.

Fear and suffering are an important part of the dream of the planet; they are how the dream of the planet keeps us down.

-- Author (Chapter 2 paragraph Page 38)

**Importance:** The dream of the planet that holds us all hostage depends on the fear and suffering of people to keep it viable.

Even when a situation seems so personal, even if others insult you directly, it has nothing to do with you. What they say, what they do, and the opinions they give are according to the agreements they have in their own minds.

-- Author (Chapter 3 paragraph Page 49)

**Importance:** The poison that another person spews is not about you... it is about them. The author cautions people to not take another person's negativity personally. It stems from their hatred, envy and resentment. It is not about the other person at all.

The big mitote in the human mind creates a lot of chaos which causes us to misinterpret everything and misunderstand everything. We only see what we want to see, and hear what we want to hear.

-- Author (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 65)

**Importance:** The author explains how the mind is encompassed in a mitote, or fog, and



that it is difficult for the individual to find the truth. The fog makes the person distort reality.

This is the mastery of intent, the mastery of the spirit, the mastery of love, the mastery of gratitude, and the mastery of life. This is the goal of the Toltec. This is the path to personal freedom.

-- Author (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 74)

**Importance:** According to the ancient Toltec, these elements must be mastered within the individual in order to find true freedom which is the ultimate goal.

Every thought becomes a communion with God, and you will live a dream without judgments, victimization, and free of the need to gossip and abuse yourself.

-- Author (Chapter 5 paragraph Page 87)

**Importance:** Once an individual maintains the four agreements, he will be free and transcend the dream of the planet that formerly compelled him to be someone he was not.

Doing your best really doesn't feel like work because you enjoy whatever you are going. You know you're doing your best when you are enjoying the action or doing it in a way that will not have negative repercussions for you.

-- Author (Chapter 5 paragraph Page 81)

**Importance:** One of the Four Agreements is to always do your best. This quotation stresses how striving to do your best should never be difficult or painful – it should be joyful and positive. If it is a struggle then the individual is trying to his best at something that doesn't suit him.

True freedom has to do with the human spirit – it is the freedom to be who we really are.

-- Author (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 93)

**Importance:** The author is distinguishing between living in a free society like America and being free to be who we really are.

To be Toltec is a way of life. It is a way of life where there are no leaders and no followers, where you have your own truth and live your own truth. A Toltec becomes wise, becomes wild, and becomes free again.

-- Author (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 100)

**Importance:** This passage captures the definition of the Toltec way of life – being free to be yourself.

Once you feel what it means to live in a state of bliss, you will love it. You will know that heaven on earth is truth – that heaven truly exists.

-- Author (Chapter 7 paragraph Page 127)

**Importance:** The ultimate goal of the Four Agreements is to achieve a state of bliss. Most people are living in a hell on earth. A person who is true to the Four Agreements will live in heaven on earth.



# Topics for Discussion

## 1

Explain what the “Dream of the Planet is. What are the sources of this dream and why everyone has tacit buy-in into the dream? How is it debilitating to the individual, according to the author?

## 2

What does the author say are the roles of parents, teachers and the clergy into the perpetuation of the “big dream?” Why do children so easily accept the tenets of the dream of the planet? How do the beliefs and ideas of the dream steal away a child’s identity?

## 3

Explain who the author describes as the Judge and Victim. How do these two entities control an individual’s freedom? How do they serve to keep the individual tied to his agreement with the planet’s big dream?

## 4

What does it mean to be impeccable in one’s words? Explain how the power of words are both white magic and black magic, according to the author. How do words free a person to be himself and how can they keep a person from attaining personal freedom?

## 5

When a person spews a hate-filled rant at another, what does the author state is actually the source of that anger and bitterness? Why is it essential that an individual not take the poisonous words of another to heart? What is the difference between black magic words and constructive criticism and how should each of these comments be received?

## 6

Why, according to the author, is it dangerous to make assumptions? What mistake – or assumption – do people often make in a very close relationship? Why is it better to ask questions about something rather than make assumptions even in a close relationship?



## 7

Why, according to the author, does a person need to understand that there are different levels of “doing your best?” On those days that an individual doesn’t do his or her best, how can the experience be used in a positive way? How can an individual not have a relapse to his old ways of blame and guilt when he fails to do his best?

## 8

Toddlers are free and wild until they reach an age of understanding. What does the author say causes them to begin to restrict their behavior? Why is it a positive goal to reclaim certain elements of these young children and how can it be attained?

## 9

Describe what the dream of the first and second attention. How are they same and what makes them different?

## 10

According to the author, why is awareness crucial in transformation from old beliefs to newfound ones? Why is it important to create a new agreement to take the place of one that is being abandoned?