

### **The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom**

*The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* is more than just a self-help book. It is a philosophical account written by a man inspired by a life-changing event that nearly left him dead. During that moment, he had what he describes as an out-of-body experience, during which he pledged to dedicate the rest of his existence to the classic quest for the discovery of the meaning of life. His studies of an ancient religion practiced by a Mexican tribe known as the Toltecs inspired him to create something of a road map for others to experience the same personal freedom without having to come close to losing their lives. This simple layout includes four basic principles, known as agreements. One thing that drew me to this tiny book with its artistically designed cover was the fact that the author, don Miguel Ruiz, did not have any titles or credentials. He was just an ordinary human being with an extraordinary story to tell.

Don Miguel Ruiz opens *The Four Agreements* with an introduction describing the dreamlike state in which we all go about in our days. This trance is known as *the dream of the planet*; the majority of us lead our lives on the basis of society's expectations. Although our livelihoods and cultures may vary, all of us are under the same types of influences. As humans, we often surrender to the beliefs we are trained to adopt in a process of *agreement*, also known as *the domestication of humans*. Ruiz calls the collective belief system instilled in each individual at birth the *Book of Law* that rules their mind, classifying and programming what is true and false or right and wrong. Unfortunately, this seemingly necessary function of order has negative by-products. For instance, within each one of us dwells an inner *Judge*, who enforces our belief system and makes us its *Victim*. Whenever the Judge criticizes what we do or fail to do, the

Victim takes over, dominating our self-esteem and imprisoning our mind. The sad fact is that ninety-five percent of the things we tell ourselves are lies.

The first agreement that must be followed is *be impeccable with your word*. I often find myself thinking of this phrase when I am faced with a moral or ethical dilemma, and my inner conscience reminds me that honesty is always the answer; I just have to remember to take responsibility without judging and blaming myself or somebody else. This first agreement is the most important of all, and also is the most difficult to honor. Words are so powerful, that it can either make or break a person's happiness. According to Ruiz, impeccability of the word is the first phase in breaking free of the inner Judge and Victim. Once we accept something about ourselves, good or bad, it is injected into our belief system and dictates how we feel about ourselves.

Once impeccability of the word is accomplished, the remaining three agreements almost become second nature. The next agreement is *don't take anything personally*. Ruiz reminds the reader that nothing anybody does is ever about them. Human beings are naturally self-involved, and therefore tend to agree with what is said about them due to *personal importance*. When I was a child, I was very shy and sensitive, so every time a classmate teased me for being quiet, I would believe that something was wrong with me. If I could go back, I probably could have accomplished a lot more if I hadn't been so afraid of being different. A person's opinion of themselves should only come from within, because that is when it is true, and not merely an imitation of reality. It is almost like ridding yourself of emotional poison and garbage when you stop taking things personally, because then there is nobody tainting you with their own problems.

The third agreement is *don't make assumptions*. Almost any sadness and drama that emotionally imprisons someone results from some sort of impossible expectation that is not fulfilled. Even when we make assumptions to ourselves by either underestimating or overestimating our powers and capabilities, the risk of failure is too great to rely on. If you lie to yourself to sound right or blame others for misfortunes in your life, it will not lead to satisfaction. Accepting others and their imperfections is just as important as doing the same for ourselves. True love can only be true if there is acceptance, without a hidden agenda.

Finally, the fourth and final agreement is *always do your best*. Nobody, not even you, has the right to fault you if you give something your best shot. However, the only way to feel fully satisfied is if your best effort truly is your best, and not just a version of your best. It is also important to remember that a person's best varies from task to task. I have always enjoyed school, but I am by no means a genius. I am also a perfectionist, which is not a good quality for somebody who is an average student. However, at the end of the day, I truly do pride myself in working hard, which is all that matters.

When I read *The Four Agreements* less than a year ago, I could not put it down. As a college student, I am used to having lots of worries, concerns, and even doubts, especially when it comes to my future. However, don Miguel Ruiz's simple yet brilliant writing reminded me that every day is another one I will never get back. Every person I push away is someone who might be gone before I know it. Life is by no means easy, but it should never be harder than it has to be. Why not spend our time living as healthy, happy, and free as we can? Ruiz's four agreements truly are foolproof for a life of personal freedom.

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