

The Four Agreements

By Don Miguel Ruiz (1997)

(This is a a two-page unauthorized summary of the book for the impatient. If you are interested in implementing these agreements in your life, read the book. It is small and worth it. – Jim Connolly, June 2010.)

Introduction

We live our lives by the agreements we have made with ourselves. They form the rules by which we live our lives. They control how we see ourselves, others, and the world in which we live. Most of our agreements are acquired from those who raise us. Our agreements are how we are “domesticated” and how we domesticate ourselves. We live by scores of agreements and most of these never enter our consciousness – our realm of choice. To become truly free, we must learn to break the agreements that are fear-based. The Four Agreements are new, consciously chosen agreements. If we work at implementing them in our lives, they can help us to become truly free.

The First Agreement: Be Impeccable with your Word

Your word is the power that you have to create. It is also your power to destroy. Depending on how it is used, the word can set you free or enslave you more than you know. To be impeccable is to be without sin. Sin is anything that you do which goes against yourself. If what we create with our word goes against someone else, it will bring their hatred and ultimately go against us. If we express love in our word to someone else, that love will ultimately be returned to us. When we use the word to curse, to blame, to find guilt or destroy, we are in hell. Hell is something we create here; it is not created by somebody else and is not another place.

Whenever we hear an opinion and believe it, we make an agreement, and it casts a spell on us and becomes part of our belief system. The only thing that can break a spell is to make a new agreement based on truth. The truth is the most important part of being impeccable with your word, and only the truth can set us free. Gossip is the worst form of black magic. Gossip has become the main form of communication in human society, creates false divisions of “us and them”, and imprints negative impressions about others that are incorporated in our agreements about them. Whether you can see it or not, you can transcend the dream of hell just by making the agreement to be impeccable with your word. It is up to you to make the agreement with yourself: “I am impeccable with my word.” The next three agreements are really born from the first one.

The Second Agreement: Don't take anything personally.

Whatever happens around you, don't take it personally. If someone tells you something negative about you, realize that is not about you. Nothing other people do is because of you, it is because of them. If people say something positive (praise, adoration, etc.) or negative (condemnation, criticism, etc.) about you, it is not about you, it is about them. Similarly if you say something negative or positive about someone else, it is about you and not them. Further,

when we listen to the criticisms and negative “self talk” coming from the voices in our mind (the mitote), don’t take those personally either. When you make it a strong habit to not take anything personally, you avoid many upsets in your life. Taking nothing personally helps you to break many habits and routines that trap you in the dream of hell and cause needless suffering.

The Third Agreement: Don’t make assumptions.

We tend to make assumptions about everything. The problem with making assumptions is we believe they are the truth. All the sadness and drama you have lived in your life is rooted in making assumptions and taking things personally. We tend to make assumptions and then gossip about them, adding to the big chaos (the mitote) in the human mind. Ask questions. Ask them of others when you find yourself assuming something about someone else. Ask them of yourself to clarify what you are thinking. Whenever you recognize an assumption you have made, question it to see if it is true. Find the voice to ask for what you want and listen to the answer. Make your decisions based on truth, not on what you assume to be true.

The Forth Agreement: Always do your best.

The forth agreement is the one that allows the other three to become ingrained habits. Everything is alive and changing all the time, so sometimes your best will be of high quality and sometimes not so good. Regardless of the quality, keep on doing your best. Enjoy what you do and don’t think about what you will get for doing it. Always do your best and don’t judge yourself for not doing enough. Don’t regret what you have done or not done, but pay attention to what you could have done better only to improve what you do in the future. Don’t expect that you will always be able to be impeccable with your word. Your routine habits are too strong and firmly rooted in your mind. But you can always do your best. Don’t expect that you will never take anything personally; just do your best. Don’t expect that you will never make another assumption, but you can certainly do your best.

Summary

The Four Agreements are a summary of the mastery of transformation, one of the masteries of the Toltec. You transform hell into heaven. The dream of the planet is transformed into your personal dream of heaven. The knowledge is there; it’s just waiting for you to use it. The Four Agreements are there; you just need to adopt these agreements and respect their meaning and power. Make this agreement today: I choose to honor the Four Agreements. There will be many obstacles because the dream of the planet is one of hell and it is very strong; it is set up to make us fail. The warrior’s goal is to transcend this world, to escape from this hell, and never come back. If you fall, do not judge. Do not give your Judge the satisfaction of turning you into a victim. If you break any of the four agreements, stand up and make the agreement again. Renew your pledge to yourself. Live one day at a time: Today I will be impeccable with my word, I will not take anything personally, I will not make assumptions and I am going to do my best.