

The Four Agreements

by Don Miguel Ruiz

Excerpts

#1 Be impeccable with your word

Your word is the power that you have to create. Through the word you express your creative power. It is through the word that you manifest everything. Regardless of what language you speak, your intent manifests itself through the word. What you dream, what you feel, and what you really are, will all be manifested through the word.

The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life. The word is the most powerful tool you have as a human; it is the tool of magic. But like a sword with two edges, your word can create the most beautiful dream, or your word can destroy everything around you. One edge is the misuse of the word, which creates a living hell. The other edge is the impeccability of the word, which will only create beauty, love, and heaven on earth. Depending upon on how it is used, the word can set you free, or it can enslave you even more than you know. All the magic you possess is based on your word.

The word is so powerful that one word can change a life or destroy the lives of millions of people. Some years ago one man in Germany, by the use of the word, manipulated a whole country of the most intelligent people. He led them into world war with just the power of his word. He convinced others to commit the most atrocious acts of violence. He activated people's fear with the word, and like a big explosion, there was killing and war all around the world. All over the world humans destroyed other humans because they were afraid of each other. Hitler's word, based on fear-generated beliefs, will be remembered for centuries.

The human mind is like a fertile ground where words are continually being planted. The seeds are opinions, ideas, and concepts. You plant a seed, a thought, and it grows. The word is like a seed, and the human mind is so fertile! The only problem is that too often it is fertile for the seeds of fear.

Take the example of Hitler: He sent out all those seeds of fear, and they grew very strong and beautifully achieved massive destruction. Seeing the awesome power of the word, we must understand what power comes out of our mouths. One fear or doubt planted in our mind can create an endless drama of events. One word is like a spell, and humans use the word like magicians.

During our [childhood, other people] gave us their opinions about us and we lived in fear over those opinions without even thinking. We believed those opinions and we lived in fear over those opinions, like not being good at swimming, or sports, or writing. Someone gives an

opinion and says, "Look, this girl is ugly!" The girl listens, believes she is ugly, and grows up with the idea that she is ugly.

By hooking our attention, the word can enter our mind and change a whole belief for better or for worse. Another example: You may believe you are stupid and you may have believed this for as long as you can remember. This [idea] can be very tricky, causing you to do a lot of things just to ensure that you are stupid. You may do something and think to yourself, "I wish I were smart, but I must be stupid or I wouldn't have done that." The mind goes on in hundreds of different directions, and we could spend days getting hooked by that one belief in our own stupidity.

Then one day someone hooks your attention and using the word, lets you know that you are not stupid. You believe what the person says. As a result, you no longer feel or act stupid. A whole spell is broken, just by the power of the word. Conversely, if you believe you are stupid, and someone hooks your attention and says, "Yes, you are really the most stupid person I have ever met," the [idea] will be reinforced and become even stronger.

Gossip has become the main form of communication in human society. It has become the way we feel close to each other, because it makes us feel better to see someone else feel as badly as we do. There is an old expression that says, "Misery likes company," and people who are suffering don't want to be all alone.

Using the analogy of the human mind as a computer, gossip can be compared to a computer virus. A computer virus is a piece of computer language written in the same language all the other codes are written in, but with harmful intent. This code is inserted into the program of your computer when you least expect it and most of the time without your awareness. After this code has been introduced, your computer doesn't work quite right, or it doesn't function at all because the codes get so mixed up with so many conflicting messages that it stops producing good results.

Human gossip works exactly the same way.

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#2 Don't take anything personally

Whatever happens around you, don't take it personally. If I see you on the street and I say, "Hey, you are so stupid," without knowing you, it's not about you; it's about me. If you take it personally, then perhaps you believe you are stupid. Maybe you think to yourself, "How does he know? Is he clairvoyant, or can everybody see how stupid I am?"

You take it personally because you agree with whatever was said. As soon as you agree, the poison goes through you, and you are trapped... What causes you to be trapped is what we call *personal importance*. Personal importance, or taking things personally, is the maximum expression of selfishness because we make the assumption that everything is about "me." During the period of our education, we learn to take everything personally. We think we are responsible for everything.

Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their own dream, in their own mind; they are in a completely different world from the one we live in. When we take something personally, we make the assumption that they know what is in our world, and we try to impose our world on their world.

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. Their point of view comes from all the programming they received during [childhood/environment].

If someone gives you an opinion and says, "Hey, you look so fat," don't take it personally, because the truth is that this person is dealing with his or her own feelings, beliefs, and opinions. That person tried to send poison to you and if you take it personally, then you take that poison and it becomes yours.

When you take things personally, then you feel offended, and your reaction is to defend your beliefs and create conflicts. You make something big out of something so little, because you have the need to be right and make everybody else wrong. You also try hard to be right by giving them your own opinions. In the same way, whatever you feel and do is just a projection of your own personal dream [ideas/beliefs], a reflection of your own agreements. What you say, what you do, and the opinions you have are according to the agreements you have made – and these opinions have nothing to do with me.

It is not important to me what you think about me, and I don't take what you think personally. I don't take it personally when people say, "Miguel, you are the best," and I don't take

it personally when they say, "Miguel, you are the worst." I know that when you are happy you will tell me, "Miguel, you are such an angel!" But, when you are mad at me you will say, "Miguel, you are such a devil!" Either way, it does not affect me because I know what I am. I don't have the need to be accepted. I don't have the need to have someone tell me, "Miguel, you are doing so good!" or "How dare you do that!"

Whatever you think, whatever you feel, is your problem and not my problem. It is the way you see the world. It is nothing personal, because you are dealing with yourself, not me. Others are going to have their own opinion according to their belief system, so nothing they think about me is really about me, but it is about them.

You may even tell me, "Miguel, what you are saying is hurting me." But it is not what I am saying that is hurting you; it is that you have wounds that I touch by what I said. There is no way that I can take this personally. Not because I don't believe in you or don't trust you, but I know that you see the world with different eyes, with your eyes. You create an entire picture or movie in your mind, and in that picture you are the director, you are the producer, you are the main actor or actress. Everyone else is a secondary actor or actress. It is your movie.

The way you see that movie is ... your point of view, something personal to you. It is no one's truth but yours. Then, if you get mad at me, I know you are dealing with yourself. I am the excuse for you to get mad. And you get mad because you are afraid, because you are dealing with fear. If you are not afraid, there is no way you will get mad at me... there is no way you will hate me... there is no way you will be jealous or sad. If [people] tell you how wonderful you are, they are not saying that because of you. You know you are wonderful. It is not necessary to believe other people who tell you that you are wonderful.

Wherever you go you will find people lying to you, and as your awareness grows, you will notice that you also lie to yourself. Do not expect people to tell you the truth because they also lie to themselves. You have to trust yourself and choose to believe or not to believe what someone says to you.

When we really see other people as they are without taking it personally, we can never be hurt by what they say or do. Even if others lie to you, it is okay. They are lying to you because they are afraid. They are afraid you will discover that they are not perfect. It is painful to take that social mask off. If others say one thing, but do another, you are lying to yourself if you don't listen to their actions. But if you are truthful with yourself, you will save yourself a lot of emotional pain. Telling yourself the truth may hurt, but you don't need to be attached to the pain. Healing is on the way, and it's just a matter of time before things will be better for you.

If someone is not treating you with love and respect, it is a gift if they walk away from you. If that person doesn't walk away, you will surely endure many years of suffering with him or her. Walking away may hurt for a while, but your heart will eventually heal. Then you can choose

what you really want. You will find that you don't need to trust others as much as you need to trust yourself to make the right choices.

When you make it a strong habit not to take anything personally, you avoid many upsets in your life. Your anger, jealousy, and envy will disappear, and even your sadness will simply disappear if you don't take things personally. You won't need to place your trust in what others do or say. You will only need to trust yourself to make responsible choices. You are never responsible for the actions of others; you are only responsible for you. When you truly understand this, and refuse to take things personally, you can hardly be hurt by the careless comments or actions of others ... You can travel around the world with your heart completely open and no one can hurt you. You can say, "I love you," without fear of being ridiculed or rejected. You can ask for what you need. You can say yes, or you can say no – whatever you choose – without guilt or self-judgment. You can choose to follow your heart always. Then you can be in the middle of hell and still experience inner peace and happiness.

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#3 Don't make assumptions

We have the tendency to make assumptions about everything. The problem with making assumptions is that *we believe* they are the truth. We could swear they are real. We make assumptions about what others are doing or thinking – we take it personally – then we blame them and react by sending poison with our word. That is why when we make assumptions, we are asking for problems. We make an assumption, we misunderstand, we take it personally, and we end up creating a whole big drama for nothing.

We create a lot of emotional poison just by making assumptions and taking it personally, because usually we start gossiping about our assumptions. Because we are afraid to ask for clarification, we make assumptions, and believe we are right about the assumptions; then we defend our assumptions and try to make someone else wrong. It is always better to ask questions than to make an assumption, because assumptions set us up for suffering.

[Often] we only see what we want to see and hear what we want to hear. We don't perceive things the way they are. We have the habit of dreaming with no basis in reality. Because we don't understand something, we make an assumption about the meaning, and when the truth comes out, the bubble of our dream pops and we find out it was not what we thought it was at all.

An example: You are walking in the mall, and you see a person you like. The person turns to you and smiles, then walks away. You can make a lot of assumptions just because of this one experience ... [and] create a whole fantasy... A whole dream begins to form just from your assumptions, and you can believe, "Oh, this person really likes me."

Making assumptions in our relationships is really asking for problems. Often we make the assumption that our partners know what we think and that we don't have to say what we want. We assume they are going to do what we want, because they know us so well. If they don't do what we assume they should do, we feel so hurt and say, "You should have known."

It is very interesting how the human mind works. We have the need to justify everything, to explain and understand everything, in order to feel safe. We have millions of questions that need answers because there are so many things that the reasoning mind cannot explain. It is not important if the answer is incorrect; just the answer itself makes us feel safe. This is why we make assumptions.

If others tell us something, we make assumptions, and if they don't tell us something we make assumptions to fulfill our need to know and to replace the need to communicate. Even if

we hear something and we don't understand, we make assumptions about what it means and then believe the assumptions. We make all sorts of assumptions because we don't have the courage to ask questions.

We make assumptions that everyone sees life the way we do. We assume that others think the way we think, feel the way we feel, judge the way we judge, and abuse the way we abuse. This is the biggest assumption that humans make. And this is why we have a fear of being ourselves around others.

We also make assumptions about ourselves, and this creates a lot of inner conflict. You overestimate or underestimate yourself because you haven't taken the time to ask yourself questions and to answer them. Perhaps you need to gather more facts about a particular situation. Or maybe you need to stop lying to yourself about what you truly want.

The way to keep yourself from making assumptions is to ask questions. Make sure the communication is clear. If you don't understand, ask. Have the courage to ask questions until you are clear as you can be, and even then do not assume you know all there is to know about a given situation. Once you hear the answer, you will not have to make assumptions because you will know the truth.

Also, find your voice to ask for what you want. Everybody has the right to tell you no or yes, but you always have the right to ask. Likewise, everybody has the right to ask you, and you have the right to say yes or no.

If you don't understand something, it is better for you to ask and be clear, instead of making assumptions. The day you stop making assumptions you will communicate cleanly and clearly, free of emotional poison. Your word becomes impeccable if you don't make assumptions.

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#4 Always do your best

This agreement allows the other three [agreements] to become deeply ingrained habits. Under any circumstance, always do your best, no more and no less. But keep in mind that your best is never going to be the same from one moment to the next. Everything is alive and changing all the time, so your best will sometimes be high quality, and other times it will not be as good. When you wake up refreshed and energized in the morning, your best will be better than when you are tired at night. Your best will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick, or sober as opposed to drunk. Your best will depend on whether you are feeling wonderful and happy, or upset, angry, or jealous.

Regardless of the quality, keep doing your best – no more and no less than your best. If you try too hard to do more than your best, you will spend more energy than is needed and in the end your best will not be enough. When you overdo, you deplete your body and go against yourself, and it will take you longer to accomplish your goal. But if you do less than your best, you subject yourself to frustrations, self-judgment, guilt, and regrets.

Doing your best, you are going to live your life intensely. You are going to be productive, you are going to be good to yourself, because you will be giving yourself to your family, to your community, to everything. But it is the action that is going to make you feel intensely happy. When you always do your best, you take action. Doing your best is taking action because you love it, not because you're expecting a reward. Most people do exactly the opposite: They only take action when they expect a reward, and they don't enjoy the action. And that's the reason why they don't do their best.

For example, most people go to work every day just thinking of payday, and the money they will get from the work they are doing. They can hardly wait until Friday or Saturday, whatever day they receive their money and can take time off. They are working for the reward, and as a result they resist work. They try to avoid the action and it becomes more difficult, and they don't do their best.

On the other hand, if you take action just for the sake of doing it, without expecting a reward, you will find that you enjoy every action you do. Rewards will come, but you are not attached to the reward. You can even get more than you would have imagined for yourself without expecting a reward. If we like what we do and always do our best, then we are really enjoying life. We are having fun, we don't get bored, and we don't have frustrations.

When you do your best you learn to accept yourself. But you have to be aware and learn from your mistakes. Learning from your mistakes means you practice, look honestly at the results, and keep practicing. This increases your awareness.

Doing your best really doesn't feel like work because you enjoy what you are doing. You know you're doing your best when you are enjoying the action of doing it in a way that will not have negative repercussions for you. You do your best because you want to do it, not because you have to do it, and not because you are trying to please other people.

If you take action because you have to, then there is no way you are going to do your best. Then it is better not to do it. No, you do your best because doing your best all the time makes *you* so happy.

Action is about living fully. Inaction is the way that we deny life. Inaction is sitting in front of the television every day for years because you are afraid to be alive and to take the risk of expressing what you are. Expressing what you are is taking action. You can have many great ideas in your head, but what makes the difference is the action. Without action upon an idea, there will be no manifestations, no results, and no rewards.

A good example of this comes from the story of Forrest Gump. He didn't have great ideas, but he took action. He was happy because he always did his best at whatever he did. He was richly rewarded without expecting any reward at all. Taking action is being alive. It's taking the risk to go out and express your dream.

You are alive, so take your life and enjoy it. You can only be you when you do your best. The first three agreements will only work if you do your best. 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 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 an assumption, but you can certainly do your best.

By doing your best, the habits of misusing your word, taking things personally, and making assumptions will become weaker and less frequent with time. If you do your best always, over and over again, you will become a master of transformation. Practice makes the master. By doing your best *you* become a master. Everything you have ever learned, you learned from repetition. You learned to write, to drive, and even to walk by repetition. You are a master of speaking your language because you practiced. Action is what makes the difference.

If you break an agreement, begin again tomorrow, and again the next day. Don't be concerned about the future; keep your attention on today, and stay in the present moment. Just live one day at a time. *Always do your best* to keep to these agreements, and soon it will be easy for you. Today is the beginning of a new dream.