

# The Four Agreements



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DON MIGUEL RUIZ

Don Miguel Ruiz is the youngest of 13 children born to his father José Ruiz and his mother Sarita Vasquez, whom he describes as healers of the Toltec tradition. Ruiz originally trained as a doctor but changed his life's path after being in a near-fatal car crash in the 1970s. He began to study indigenous Mexican tradition, based on the oral history passed down to his mother from previous generations of his family, which Ruiz refers to as "Toltec." Ruiz published *The Four Agreements* in 1997, and it was the first of Ruiz's 10 books (some co-written with his son Jose Ruiz) that frame indigenous Mexican shamanistic beliefs in practical terms pertaining to contemporary life, with the aim of providing spiritual enlightenment to the reader. Ruiz's works are highly respected by writers and thinkers in the "New Thought" movement, which centers on philosophies of personal empowerment based on the cultivation of an optimistic worldview.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Toltec civilization of southern Mexico thrived between 900 and 1168 C.E. before mysteriously falling into decline. The Toltec people are known for excellent craftsmanship, polytheistic religious beliefs centering on two gods, and the ritual practice of human sacrifice. However, although Ruiz invokes the word "Toltec" to capture the spiritual beliefs of his ancestors, his books have no direct connection with concrete evidence of this historical civilization and its traditions, of which few written records exist. Ruiz's use of the word "Toltec" instead alludes to spiritual beliefs among shamanistic healers drawn from Mexico's broader indigenous culture and oral history, including influences from Aztec culture, which thrived in the 1300s, before the Americas were colonized by Europeans. Ruiz's writing is also associated with neoshamanism—a movement that derives its understanding of spirituality from indigenous American traditions—which was popularized in the 1980s.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The Four Agreements* is the first of 10 books written by Miguel Ruiz between 1997 and 2018, including *The Fifth Agreement* (2015), which advocates that the reader adopt an additional belief—to be skeptical but learn to listen—along with the original four beliefs Ruiz outlines in *The Four Agreements*. Ruiz's collective body of work is often considered compatible with books embraced by members of the "New Thought" movement, who endorse writing that focuses on personal empowerment,

optimism, and the universal presence of God. Early examples include Prentice Mulford's 1887 work *Your Forces and How to Use Them* and Bruce MacLelland's 1907 book *Prosperity Through Thought Force*, which advocates for positive thinking as a way to attract success in one's daily life. This idea was more recently popularized by Rhonda Byrne in her 2006 bestseller *The Secret*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*
- **When Written:** 1997
- **Where Written:** Unknown
- **When Published:** 1997
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; Spirituality; Self-Improvement
- **Setting:** The mind of the reader
- **Climax:** Ruiz recites two prayers to help the reader recognize their union with divinity and embrace the power of universal love, which he believes is abundant in the universe.
- **Antagonist:** The Judge, The Victim
- **Point of View:** First-person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Oprah Effect.** *The Four Agreements* gained widespread popularity when Oprah Winfrey catapulted Ruiz to fame by mentioning his book on her television show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Winfrey subsequently recorded a lengthy interview with Ruiz on his life philosophy and spiritual teachings.

**Coined.** The recognition received for *The Four Agreements* includes a challenge coin engraved with the four agreements, issued to Ruiz by the United States Navy.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Miguel Ruiz begins *The Four Agreements* with a brief description of the Toltec people, an ancient society from southern Mexico, who studied the union of humans with divinity (or God). Ruiz names himself as a nagual, a master of the Toltec way of life, which centers around connecting with abundant happiness and universal love. Ruiz says that he will share "the powerful teachings of the Toltec" in this book.

First, Ruiz describes a parable—or ancient myth—about a student of medicine who went into a cave three thousand years

ago and realized that all beings in the universe are a unity made of “pure light, pure love,” including the stars (which he calls tonal), people (which he calls nagual), and God, which is everything and everyone. He decides to call himself the “Smokey Mirror” to remember that everyone is a reflection of everyone else, but people can’t see this because of the “smoke” or the “**dream**”—the illusion that we are separate beings made of matter—between them.

Ruiz then tells the reader that everything they see and perceive is an illusion, or a dream. For Ruiz, dreaming is the same as perceiving reality, meaning that even when humans are awake, we are dreaming. The dream that most people experience is “the dream of the planet,” which is what children are taught about the world when they are very young (by their parents, teachers, caregivers, and authority figures in society). The dream of the planet includes beliefs about the world and about how to behave. Ruiz defines a belief as some claim about the world that a person has agreed to accept. When children are very young, they are “domesticated”—or socially conditioned—to believe what human society believes. Put another way, they are taught how to make their own internal dream—or worldview, including beliefs about how to act—match the “dream of the planet.” Children are indoctrinated into acting the way society wants by being punished for bad behavior and being rewarded for good behavior. Children learn to crave rewards and fear punishment, and act to please others instead of themselves. Eventually, children internalize the tendency to assess, punish, and reward behavior by developing two inner voices named the Judge (who constantly evaluates everything they think and do) and the Victim (who receives the Judge’s criticism). Because nobody can ever act perfectly—that is, do everything exactly the way society wants—the Judge is usually harsh and critical, and the Victim feels ashamed, inadequate, and rejected. The Judge is so harsh that most people are terrified of this voice, and they do everything they can to avoid the Judge’s criticism. Ruiz thinks that existing like this is tantamount to experiencing a “living hell.”

Ruiz argues that humans don’t need to experience life as a hellish nightmare, but we are blinded by the beliefs that we learned as children, which are “lies” that make us suffer because we reject ourselves and others for being inadequate according to society’s expectations. There is a way out of this cycle of judgement and self-rejection, and it centers on agreeing to adopt a different set of beliefs. If humans change our agreements, Ruiz argues, we can perceive the world in a way that replaces the “hell” with a new dream that is more like “heaven.”

The first agreement Ruiz wants people to accept is to “be impeccable with your word.” By this, Ruiz means that people should agree to withhold negative or judgmental comments about themselves and others and only express only positive

ones that will not harm or dishonor themselves. The first agreement is important because it recognizes that people love themselves and will only utter words that honor that love. Practicing the first agreement also means that a person will not gossip about others, because judgmental comments about others invite criticism back, which is also harmful to the project of self-acceptance and self-love.

The second agreement is “don’t take anything personally.” When a person takes something personally, they are assuming that a comment is about them, when in actuality, all it reflects is somebody else’s perception, or “dream.” Taking things personally makes people feel offended and defensive. Instead, people should recognize that negative things other people say are not important, because they’re not true. It’s easy to see that a negative judgment from somebody else isn’t true when a person loves themselves. If they already love themselves, then no matter what anybody else says, they will remain at peace and simply ignore the false judgement.

The third agreement is “don’t make assumptions.” Humans are taught to fill in gaps in their knowledge with assumptions and we tend to believe our assumptions, which creates a lot of unnecessary suffering. For example, a person who sees somebody smile at them might assume the other person likes them. They might dream up a relationship in their head based on this assumption and be disappointed and hurt when it doesn’t transpire in real life. Or, to take another example, a person might assume that their partner knows what they desire (say, emotional support) and then become upset when their partner doesn’t provide it. Ruiz argues that it’s best to ask questions and communicate our needs and desires—without fear of judgement—instead of assuming.

The fourth agreement is “always do your best.” Ruiz cautions that it’s important to remember that a person’s best will change depending on their mood, how tired they are, and many other factors. “Doing your best” means taking action without overdoing it. It also means doing things that provide enjoyment from the mere act of doing them. When people do things for external rewards (like money), they try to cut corners—for instance, shirking work because they hate it. However, if a person does things because they enjoy the action itself—say, running or playing piano—it will be easy to do their best, because they enjoy it. When a person does their best, they silence their inner Judge: even if they fail, or do a bit worse than yesterday, they can always say, “I did my best.” If they fail to uphold one of the four agreements sometimes—which is inevitable—they can again say, “I did my best,” and then they can simply move on instead of berating themselves.

Ruiz argues that adopting the four agreements will create new habits that reorient people to act out of love instead of fear, which transforms their existence to one of happiness, self-acceptance, and profound love.

Ruiz moves on to discuss freedom. He thinks that most people

aren't free to be who they really are. Humans are "wild" when they are born: children do what they want and express themselves without fear. Children have fun, enjoy the world around them, and live in the moment without thinking about the future or the past. These are all "natural human tendencies." Adults, however, are so afraid of the Judge and the Victim that they rarely do any of these things. In order to be free, adults need to "become wild" again, or reconnect with their inner child and live as children do: for themselves and for their own joy, without fear or judgment.

Ruiz argues that according to Toltec wisdom, there are three paths to achieving freedom—that is, to destroying the "parasite" that comprises the Judge, the Victim, and the belief system they uphold. The first path is named the "dream of the second attention," in which a person faces each of their fears and dismantles them one by one, replacing their social conditioning with a "new dream" that replaces fear with love. The second path is known as the "discipline of the warrior," in which a person learns to control their emotions, which makes it easier not to react with negative emotions when provoked. The second path begins with self-forgiveness. The third and final path is the "initiation of the dead." The third path entails recognizing that life is fleeting and death could be around the corner. If that's the case, why not live life to the fullest? Acute awareness of mortality can thus enable a person to enjoy being alive here and now.

Ruiz asks readers to forget everything they've ever learned and recognize they have the power to change their perception of reality. He believes that if they accept the four agreements, they'll stop judging themselves and start accepting themselves, see love pour out of everything around them, and experience life as a state of bliss.

Ruiz ends *The Four Agreements* with two prayers. The first, named a "prayer for freedom," aims to recognize the union between people and God. The second prayer, named a "prayer for love," encourages people to embrace the fiery power of universal love.

love, life force, and God, but that this truth about reality is obscured by pervasive social norms. The four agreements thus teach people to replace the "lies" they have been taught with the truth, allow them to act out of love instead of fear, and to experience freedom by acting for themselves instead of others.

**Judge** – Ruiz argues that most people's lives are controlled by two inner voices that give a running commentary on every move they make. The first of these is the Judge, which evaluates everything a person thinks and does, and delivers harsh criticism if the thought or behavior is imperfect according to the rules of society that a person internalizes in childhood. Since people can never act perfectly all the time, Ruiz argues, most people's mental experiences center on the "tyranny" of the Judge, who criticizes their every move and tells them they are not good enough. Ruiz believes that adopting the "four agreements"—which are rules for how to think and act—will silence the Judge forever, meaning people will no longer feel the need to perpetually judge themselves or others and can focus their energy on other endeavors, like doing things that make them feel happy.

**Victim** – Ruiz argues that since most people go through life with an internal commentary on everything they are doing imperfectly (delivered by their inner critical voice, the Judge), they also develop another inner voice—which he names the Victim—that receives the Judge's harsh criticisms and feels ashamed, fearful, and inadequate. The victim fears being judged so much that most people go through life trying to avoid negative judgement, instead of acting based on their own desires. Essentially, the Victim is an internal voice that says "I'm not good enough" and makes people feel disempowered and sorry for themselves. Ruiz's goal in *The Four Agreements* is to silence the Victim and replace this voice with self-acceptance, self-love, courage, and positivity.

**The Smokey Mirror (the student of medicine)** – According to a parable that Ruiz relates, Smokey Mirror was a student learning medicine thousands of years ago. He had a revelation in a cave that everything in the universe is made of light that radiates universal love, including himself, the stars, and God. The student decides to call himself the "Smokey Mirror" to remind himself that what people normally perceive—such as matter and many different beings in the world—is an illusion. He means that people are all connected: they are all reflections of each other and everything in the universe, but they cannot see this truth because their perception is clouded by the illusion of separation—that is, the "smoke"—between them.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Man** – This is a man who, Ruiz relates, wants to transcend suffering by mediating.

**Master** – The master is a Buddhist who tells the man that it will take him longer to transcend suffering if he meditates too



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Miguel Ruiz** – Ruiz is the author and narrator of *The Four Agreements*. Ruiz describes himself as a "nagual," a descendent of the ancient Toltec society of southern Mexico. In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz draws on his knowledge of the Toltec people's "ancestral wisdom" to argue that if people agree to always act according to four core beliefs (or "agreements"), they will transform their lives from a state of misery (based on mistrust, judgement, and fear) to a state of happiness based on the expression of universal love. Ruiz also believes that all beings in the universe are essentially united as a single expression of

much.

**Old Man** – Ruiz describes this character as a man who shares his love with the reader in the form of a flame from his heart.

**Teacher** – The teacher is a man who, according to Ruiz, shared his love (as a flame from his heart) with the old man.

## TERMS

**Agreement** – Miguel Ruiz uses the word “agreement” as a technical term for “belief.” An agreement is a belief that a person has agreed to hold. A person who believes in God, for example, has agreed to adopt the belief that there is a God, and to act in accordance with that belief in their life. Ruiz emphasizes that beliefs are actually agreements because people can choose to reject beliefs or stop agreeing with something they accepted as true in the past. A person’s beliefs about the world are technically agreements that children make blindly when they are very young, because they trust their caregivers and believe everything they are told. In adulthood, however, a person can change their beliefs or make new agreements. In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz’s aim is to convince readers to revoke their prior agreements and adopt four new ones that he believes will increase their happiness and their freedom.

**Tonal** – Ruiz claims that the ancient Toltec people of Southern Mexico named the light of the stars *tonal*. The *tonal* is one side of a picture that encompasses all reality. All things in the world are either *tonal* (the light of the stars) or *nagual* (the light between the stars). Together, the *tonal* and the *nagual* describe all reality as an all-encompassing abundance of light, infused with life and universal love, which is the true nature of existence.

**Nagual** – Ruiz defines *nagual* as having a dual meaning according to the Toltec people: the term refers to the light between the stars and also refers to a shaman or “master” of Toltec wisdom. Ruiz describes himself as a *nagual* descended from the “Eagle Knight lineage.” A *nagual*, for Ruiz, is a person who recognizes their true nature: as light that shines an abundance of love, just like everything else in the universe, including God, as well as the stars (which are named *tonal*). Matter, therefore, is just an illusion. Instead, reality is made up of *tonal* (the light of the stars) and *nagual* (the light between the stars), and a *nagual* is also a person who has mastered the art of perceiving the world this way.

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## JUDGMENT AND FEAR

In *The Four Agreements*, Miguel Ruiz argues that the way in which humans are “domesticated”—conditioned to live in society—is fundamentally damaging to the psyche. Children are indoctrinated to behave according to social rules by being punished for bad behavior and rewarded for good behavior. Due to this indoctrination, most people grow up with an ingrained habit of judging their own behavior and punishing themselves for failing to live up to the social rules they have internalized. According to Ruiz, this way of thinking encourages humans to live in perpetual fear. People fear doing, saying, or thinking something wrong; being imperfect; being judged; or being punished by themselves and others. Ruiz argues that living in this cycle of self-judgment and fear causes humans to suffer unnecessarily, and that this keeps us trapped in a “living hell” on Earth.

In order to demonstrate how society indoctrinates people, Ruiz lays out his concept of the “Book of Law” that governs how people behave. He compares humanity in to an “autodomesticated animal” that is punished and rewarded (often by ourselves) to think and act in certain ways, much like a pet dog or cat is trained to perform or refrain from certain behaviors. It is through a similar process of social reinforcement that society’s dominant belief system about what’s acceptable and unacceptable—whether that be morals, ways of presenting oneself, or other societal standards—comes to be encoded into a kind of Book of Law within each individual’s mind. Ruiz believes that this kind of singular, rigid belief system can be extremely detrimental to human beings because it often contradicts with “our own inner nature” or intuition of what we know in our souls to be true. Thus, people inevitably end up forcing themselves to live according to society’s standards rather than their own sense of what’s right and wrong—a tendency, Ruiz argues, that results in an unfulfilling life of shame, self-judgment, and fear of breaking with the strict Book of Law that is accepted by other people.

Ruiz argues that by adulthood, most people have internalized the socially-enforced method of rewarding themselves for good behavior and punishing themselves for bad behavior, which sets them up to consistently judge, berate, and reject themselves. Ruiz believes that “domestication,” or social conditioning, causes all adults develop two strong inner voices named the “Judge” and the “Victim,” who rule people’s lives and cause them to hate themselves. A person’s inner Judge constantly evaluates every move they make against the Book of Law in their mind, criticizing their thoughts and behavior when they fail to live up to the belief system they have internalized. Accordingly, a person’s inner “Victim” receives the Judge’s



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have

criticism and subsequently feels shame, guilt, inadequacy, and self-rejection. Since nobody can ever think or act perfectly all the time, people are essentially living in a cycle of abuse centered on self-judgment, self-criticism, and self-hatred. In essence, the inner “Victim” perpetually thinks, “I’m not worthy of love” and the inner “Judge” reinforces this belief by perpetually agreeing, “Yes, you are not good enough.” People thus reject themselves for being inadequate and feel miserable instead of loving and accepting themselves.

Ruiz believes that this cycle of judgment and criticism into which people are indoctrinated causes them to live entirely out of fear, which generates such widespread negativity that many people are essentially trapped in a “living hell” or “nightmare” version of reality. People learn to act in ways that will please others because they are afraid of being judged and criticized, which causes people to wear “masks” in society to hide their perceived imperfections. Obscuring one’s true self generates negative emotions like jealousy toward people who wear better masks and thereby move through the world without as much criticism, and this jealousy further motivates people to spread “emotional poison” against others in order to make themselves feel worthier in comparison. The energy a person spends in constantly judging and criticizing themselves, wearing social masks, and judging others often depletes them to the point that they have no energy left to pursue things they enjoy and love. According to Ruiz, given the widespread conformity to society’s Book of Law, this means that most humans live in a world saturated with fear, hate, and judgment—a state of misery, or a “living hell.”

Thus, the root cause of suffering in the world, according to Ruiz, is the belief system that people learn as children against which they constantly measure themselves. Because nobody can ever measure up to the image of perfection that they have ingrained in their mind, they reject themselves instead of accepting themselves, act out of fear of being judged instead of on the basis of their own desires, and are trapped in a limited—or, hellish—way of being that is ruled entirely by fear.



## BELIEFS, AGREEMENTS, AND TRANSFORMATIVE HAPPINESS

In *The Four Agreements*, Miguel Ruiz argues that the wisdom of the Toltec, an early Mexican society, can show people how to change their lives from a “living hell” (centered on judgment, abuse, and fear) to a “heaven on Earth” (centered on love and self-acceptance). Ruiz argues that humans’ beliefs are really more like “agreements” because we implicitly agree to uphold them by basing our thoughts and behavior around them. Thinking of a belief as an agreement, then, indicates that it’s possible to choose to *disagree* with a belief—people don’t have to accept the beliefs others have about them, nor those they have about themselves. Ruiz’s central argument in the book is that there are four

agreements (beliefs) a person can adopt and live by that will guide them away from living a “nightmare” existence rooted in fear and self-rejection and toward a peaceful, happy existence centered on love and self-acceptance.

Ruiz argues that beliefs—about how to behave, what is good and bad, and what is true—are really agreements: they are rules that people accept or agree to live by. Very young children accept beliefs (or “agree” with the belief system they are taught) without questioning them because they love, trust, and have faith in their caregivers. In adulthood, however, many people learn to reject beliefs that they disagree with. In other words, they can withhold or revoke their agreement to believe something (say, about politics, or God) or how to behave (say, around an abusive parent). In this way, beliefs are essentially agreements to behave in certain ways, and can be changed when a person enacts their power to reject an agreement or make a different one.

With this conception of beliefs as agreements, Ruiz argues that if a person makes the titular “four agreements” that he deems essential to a happy life, they will gradually move away from acting based on fear and the internalized judgments of others, and toward acting as their true self. The four agreements are: “always be impeccable with your word,” “never take anything personally,” “don’t make assumptions,” and “always do your best.” Ruiz believes that adopting the four agreements works because each agreement entails accepting that people are already good enough exactly as they are, which silences the inner “Judge” and the inner “Victim” (the inner critical and shaming voices that exist within each person).

Ruiz outlines how adopting the four agreements free a person from their inner Judge and Victim. If a person is always “impeccable with their word,” it means they agree to never speak out negatively about others. The person is already good enough, so they have no need to spread comments that make other people look bad in order to make themselves look better. If a person “never take[s] anything personally,” they agree that other people’s comments—that the person is too “fat” or “ugly” or “stupid”—are not true, they only reflect other people’s need to judge. The person already accepts themselves just as they are, so other people’s judgments are irrelevant. If a person doesn’t “make assumptions,” they agree to always communicate clearly and ask for clarity without fear of ridicule or judgment, rather than filling in gaps with what they assume to be true and acting based on those thoughts. For example, if a wife assumes that her husband should already know what she is thinking, she’ll likely feel upset when he doesn’t act how she expects (say, she wants affection but he doesn’t offer her a hug, so she gets upset). If, however, the pair agree to communicate their needs and desires instead of assuming their spouse should just know what the other wants, they will have a healthier relationship based on honesty and clarity, instead of one based on misunderstanding and conflict. If a person always does their

best, it means they agree to do the best they are capable of, given their mood and energy level at the time. This means that a person won't do as much as is physically possible—rather, they will respect their limits and make their best effort without overdoing it. Whether or not the person succeeds, they'll have no need to judge or berate themselves for not doing something well enough, since they'll always know that they've done the best they could at the time.

With these four agreements, Ruiz argues that it's possible to transform one's life from a state of misery (in which one acts out of fear of judgment) to a life of happiness (in which one already accepts they are good enough and has no need to judge oneself). In making the "four agreements" Ruiz outlines—in other words, by adopting the beliefs and practices of self-acceptance—a person can effectively rid themselves of negative thoughts and limiting self-talk. Living under the four agreements, a person's behavior will shift their mindset away from the habit of judging and victimizing themselves and toward the habit of loving and accepting themselves, which will bring them happiness and transform their existence from "hell" to "heaven" on Earth.



## HUMAN PERCEPTION, REALITY, AND UNIVERSAL LOVE

In *The Four Agreements*, Miguel Ruiz looks to the Toltec community of Southern Mexico for wisdom.

The Toltec believe that the world humans perceive is an illusion—humans' perception acts like "smoke" that fogs over our vision and prevents us from realizing that everything in the universe (including humans, plants, animals, and even God) is one being made of light, which is the same thing as love. Humans do not comprehend the truth easily because we need to "**dream**," or perceive, a reality before we can make sense of it, and we are indoctrinated with a certain picture of reality—which Ruiz calls "the dream of the planet"—when we are young. Toltec wisdom, according to Ruiz, is the path to perceiving reality accurately. In learning how to adopt a different "dream" or perception of life, one can replace the socially-constructed "dream of the planet" with a more accurate dream which acknowledges that all beings are one, divinity is in everyone and everything, and the universe is full of love.

Ruiz believes that all people are born with the capacity to "dream," which means "to perceive," but that the first dream we learn as children is a lie: it teaches us to perceive an illusion. Humans "dream" when awake and asleep. The difference is that when people are awake, their dreams are more linear, meaning that the reality they perceive is more ordered. As children, humans are taught how to dream "the way society dreams." They are taught "the dream of the planet," which contains a way of perceiving the world based on what society deems appropriate, including beliefs about what exists in the world

and what humans are, and rules about how we should act. Ruiz explains, "the dream of the planet includes all of society's rules, its beliefs, its laws, its religions, its different cultures and ways to be, its governments, schools, social events, and holidays." However, according to Ruiz, "ninety five percent" of society's way of perceiving the world is a lie, and humans suffer because we believe these "lies." The "dream of the planet," therefore, is like a "fog" or "smoke" that obscures the real truth from people and filters their perceptions.

Ruiz argues that Toltec wisdom teaches people how to transform their dreams, which will enable people to rid themselves of the "dream of the planet" and form a new dream that lets people see the truth. The truth, according to the Toltec, is that everything in the universe is a single, all-encompassing being made of light. Light is love, life, and God—they are all the same, and this is also what humans are. The "dream of the planet" is like a "**parasite**" or a "monster of a thousand heads" that makes people "sick" and must be destroyed. The Toltec believe there are three ways to destroy the "parasite," but they are all difficult to achieve.

The first approach—named "the art of transformation: the dream of the second attention"—entails tackling each of the parasite's thousand heads one by one, or dismantling each fear-based belief and replacing these beliefs with different ones. Destroying all of the fear-based beliefs that make up the "dream of the planet" requires "awareness" of the beliefs and a commitment to replace them with the titular "four agreements," which are four rules for behavior that direct a person's actions away from fear and toward love. Ruiz also describes this approach as something like "going into the desert" to face your "demons" one by one, which eradicates fear and thereby frees people from "the dream of the planet" that limits them.

The second approach—named "the discipline of the warrior: controlling your own behavior"—entails forgiving others for their wrongdoing, letting go of resentment, and forgiving oneself. Forgiveness, for Ruiz, replaces self-rejection with self-acceptance and self-love, which essentially means realizing that the self and love are the same thing (which is also light, life, and God). In order to forgive, a person must learn to control their emotions so that they do not get upset at others who wrong them or at themselves for doing wrong. Instead of becoming troubled, a person should practice staying calm and replacing negative feelings with forgiveness. This allows people to act genuinely, out of love, rather than reacting based on indoctrinated ideas of what's right and wrong.

The third approach—named "the initiation of the dead: embracing the angel of death"—entails acknowledging that anyone can die at any moment. Realizing this enables people to treat life as precious and act as if they are truly alive by doing what makes them happy (or feel love) instead of what society wants. In doing so, they effectively reject "the dream of the planet" and can instead acknowledge their true selves and live

based on their authentic desires.

Ruiz's three methods for how people can remove the "dream of the planet" (society's rules for what to believe and how to live) from their minds focus on acting out of love and thus connecting with their true selves and seeing the world for what it really is. When acting out of love, people connect with truth as defined by Toltec wisdom, which holds that all beings are one thing: love itself.



## CHILDHOOD, ADULTHOOD, AND FREEDOM

In *The Four Agreements*, Miguel Ruiz invokes ancient wisdom from the Toltec (an early Mexican civilization) about how to live a happy life. In particular, he examines the Toltec belief that freedom is being like a child: having fun, enjoying life, and doing what makes one happy. Ruiz argues that children are free—or "wild"—because they act how they want, express themselves openly, and follow their whims without fear. However, children are quickly "domesticated" by being taught how to act according to society's rules, and this leads to them growing up to become unhappy, dissatisfied adults. According to Ruiz, a person can become free once again if they replace the tendency to act in a way that satisfies others with a tendency to act childlike: to live in the moment, to do what they want, and to satisfy their true desires.

Ruiz argues that young children are "free" because they act without worrying about what they should or shouldn't be doing. He says, "As children we are not afraid of the future or ashamed of the past. Our normal human tendency is to enjoy life, to play, to explore, to be happy, and to love." This suggests that living without inhibitions is the natural way of life for human beings, but that we are gradually indoctrinated into being "afraid of the future or ashamed of the past" as we grow up and face social pressures and responsibilities. Most adults, in contrast to children, live a kind of perverted existence in which they are not free because most of their lives are spent trying to please others. They fear being judged and criticized, so they tend to act in a way that avoids criticism rather than acting based on their own desires. Ruiz observes that children exhibit natural human tendencies like curiosity, playing, engaging with the world, and expressing themselves which become suppressed in adulthood because of the perpetual fear of being judged.

Ruiz believes that most adults lose this sense of childhood freedom and resign themselves to "domesticated," unfulfilling existences in which they live for other people rather than for themselves. For example, it's common for people to spend most of their waking hours working jobs they hate—not because they *want* to, but because they are *supposed* to earn money, buy houses, and fulfill other societal expectations. People thus often end up wasting money on escapism, such as drinking to forget that they spend most of their time doing something they hate.

As such, Ruiz suggests that the only authentic and meaningful way to live is by freely pursuing what sparks childlike joy—otherwise, people are doomed to live unfulfilling lives in which they never experience true, lasting happiness.

In establishing this distinction between children and adults, Ruiz suggests that if people were to simply do their best at things they actually enjoy doing (as children do), simply doing those things would make them happy. Freedom can be achieved by becoming aware of the ways in which social rules inhibit natural human tendencies, and one can achieve lasting happiness and fulfillment by embodying one's inner child. To do so, Ruiz says, people should pay attention to activities that make them happy and summon the courage to live like children by doing those things all the time. Rewards like money will inevitably come from following one's passion, but those rewards will be a bonus rather than one's reason for acting. Ruiz writes, "if we like what we do, if we always do our best, then we are really enjoying life. We are having fun, we don't get bored, we don't have frustrations." In other words, Ruiz believes that people should take stock of the reasons why they act and only do things because the action itself brings them happiness and personal fulfillment. Such actions enable people to reconnect with their inner child, to become "wild" and to be free, which is what it means to live the Toltec way of life. Ruiz thus concludes that, in accordance with Toltec belief, a person is only free when they are able to be themselves. In doing what one wants because it makes one happy while doing it, one can enjoy life the way a child does, even in adulthood.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## DREAM

Miguel Ruiz uses the metaphor of dreaming to represent human perception. In order to make sense of the world, Ruiz says, people need to "dream" or perceive it first—and much like a dream one has during sleep, one's way of perceiving the world can either be lucid and actively constructed, or passive and unconsciously constructed. The most common dream (or mode of perception) is the one that children are taught by their caregivers and the authority figures in their lives (such as parents and teachers) and by society at large. Ruiz names the typical dream that children learn—or the way they are taught to perceive the world—"the dream of the planet." Sometimes, Ruiz also calls this "the dream of human society." The dream of the planet is a way of seeing the world that tells children what the universe contains, what they are as human beings, and how they should act. Every person has their own "dream" (or way of perceiving the world)

that is derived from the dream of the planet. For Ruiz, however, the dream of the planet is actually a lie that warps human perception. In essence, the dream of the planet is a “nightmare” full of fear, judgement, conflict, and misery. Ruiz believes that he can invoke the wisdom of the early Mexican Toltec people to teach modern-day humanity how to perceive the world differently, or construct a “new dream” centered on perceiving the world as it really is: a single entity made of universal love.



### COMPUTER VIRUS

Ruiz uses the metaphor of a computer virus to represent gossip, by which he means negative talk about other people. Ruiz argues that when somebody talks negatively about another person, they make others see that person in a negative light, which makes others more likely to talk negatively about that person as well. Gossip, therefore, spreads like a computer virus: negative talk warps the way people perceive others, much like the way a computer virus takes control of a computer and changes what the computer user sees. The computer is therefore analogous to a person’s mind, while the computer virus is analogous to the negative talk that clouds their perception of others.



### PARASITE

Ruiz compares people’s tendency to internally judge and shame themselves to a parasite that feeds off of fear. He visualizes the parasite as a “monster with a thousand heads” whose body is comprised of one’s inner Judge persona, one’s inner Victim persona, and society’s “Book of Law” (belief system) that’s internalized at a young age. The parasite’s heads thus represent each of a person’s fears, which are all grounded in and perpetuated by society’s standards as well as by a person’s inner monologue. Ruiz’s aim is to help readers silence the inner voices that judge, shame, and agree to their internalized belief system, and he says that a person needs to “kill” the parasite in order to do so. One way to do this is by facing each fear one by one, which would be like cutting off each of the monster’s heads. Another way is by controlling one’s emotions and preventing fear from rising up, which would be like starving the monster of its food. The final way involves recognizing one’s own mortality, which Ruiz describes as killing the parasite while keeping its host (the person) alive. As such, Ruiz portrays self-judgment as a dangerous, infectious presence—but one that can ultimately be killed if an individual is willing to face their fears and challenge themselves.



### FLAME

In the closing passage of *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz recites a prayer in which an old man gives the reader a flame that he received from his teacher’s heart. The

flame represents universal love, which, for Ruiz, is the very fabric of reality. The old man explains that the flame he received from his teacher engulfed him and grew to light up everything in the universe, which enabled the old man to recognize that when he looks at something else, he is also looking at himself. In essence, the light of the flame represents the old man’s ability to see that he and everyone else are all the same thing: love. The flame thus captures what reality actually is for Ruiz: one light (or fire) that unites everything as a single embodiment of love.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Amber-Allen Publishing edition of *The Four Agreements* published in 1997.

### Introduction: The Smokey Mirror Quotes

☞ *Everything is God.*

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), The Smokey Mirror (the student of medicine)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** xvii

#### Explanation and Analysis

Miguel Ruiz begins *The Four Agreements* by explaining that he is sharing indigenous knowledge from an early Mexican society called the Toltec, and that this wisdom has been passed down to him by his family. The first story Ruiz tells is a parable about a student of medicine who has a realization about the nature of the universe while he is sleeping in a cave. The student realizes that he is made of light, like everything else in the universe. Here, Ruiz explains that the “light” that everyone is made of is a manifestation of God. He means that even though it seems like humans are separate from each other and from all other things, we are actually all manifestations of God. As such, everyone and everything in the universe exists as a single entity of light that shines universal love through all beings. When the student returns to his town, the villagers sense that he is radiating the energy of a deity and the student tells the villagers that he is God, but so are they, and so is everything else in the universe.

Ruiz uses this simple anecdote to impart his Toltec worldview onto the reader: at the base of all of Ruiz’s beliefs is the notion that love is the central force which unites all things. As such, much of the advice he gives the reader

throughout *The Four Agreements* is shared with the intent of helping them to realize that they, too, are nothing but love—and therefore, that thinking or acting in a way that denies this reality is essentially living a lie. When Ruiz goes on to outline the four agreements (beliefs) he deems necessary to living a happy life, he does so around the central notion that “*Everything is God*” and that everything (and everyone) therefore deserves love and respect.

☞ “The real us is pure love, pure light.”

**Related Characters:** The Smokey Mirror (the student of medicine) (speaker), Miguel Ruiz

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** xvii

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz relays the story of an ancient student of medicine who has a revelation in a cave. Here, the student realizes that he is made of light, just like everything else in the universe, which is all a single manifestation of God. The student exclaims that although humans feel like we are made of matter, we are actually made of light—and, importantly, that this light is the exact same thing as “pure love,” which is also God. Ruiz believes that love is abundant in the universe. It’s what all beings actually are, so all of “us” are one entity, and that entity is love. In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz aims to help the reader connect with this experience of love, meaning that he instructs the reader to only act when their action is a manifestation of love, which he believes will set them free from a limited existence rooted in fear. Love, therefore, is equated with reality, truth, happiness, and the experience of freedom, which is captured in what the student says here.

☞ “That smoke is the *Dream*, and the mirror is you, the dreamer.”

**Related Characters:** The Smokey Mirror (the student of medicine) (speaker), Miguel Ruiz

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** xix

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz tells the story of an ancient student of medicine who realizes that everyone and everything is one being made of light that shines universal love. The problem, Ruiz says, is that most humans aren’t able to see this. When humans look around at the world, we see different people struggling to figure out how to act, what to believe, and how to be good. However, the student explains that most people’s perception is occluded by a “smoke” or “*Dream*,” a vision of reality that is rooted in society’s expectations and driven by fear. This vision fogs the humanity’s view and renders us unable to experience what they really are, which is love. Most people think the “smoke” or the “*Dream*” is what the world really is, but they are essentially dreaming up a false reality. According to Ruiz, what they should focus on instead is the fact that they are actually a “mirror”—a reflection of the light that makes up the universe, which also is a part of them—and they have the power to change their “*Dream*” to see the world for what it really is: an abundance of love.

## Chapter 1. Domestication... Quotes

☞ By using our attention we learned a whole reality, a whole dream.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), The Smokey Mirror (the student of medicine)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 3

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has just told a story about an ancient student of medicine who realizes that most people have a false understanding of reality because they don’t see that they are really a manifestation of love, light, and God. Here, Ruiz explains how humans come to adopt the false picture of reality that most of us live with. Ruiz argues that human perception is the same thing as dreaming. As children, humans are taught the rules of society—including beliefs about what the world is, and expectations about how to act—by paying attention to their caregivers. What they learn is a specific “dream,” or a way of seeing the world that most people share.

Later, Ruiz gives a number of names for this shared way of perceiving the world, including “the dream of the planet,”

“the dream of human society,” and “the dream of the first attention.” He uses dreaming as a metaphor for human perception, as humans form their idea of reality in much the same way as they unconsciously dream. Toward the end of the book, Ruiz explains that the first belief system humans learn is the one we pay attention to as children, when we learn to believe what the people around us believe, and act the way the people around us act. This is why the “whole dream” he refers to in this quote is later called the “dream of the first attention.” Ruiz’s aim in the book is to instead direct a person’s attention toward adopting a healthier and more accurate way of perceiving the world, with its own belief system, which he calls “the dream of the second attention.”

☞ The only way to store information is by agreement.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 5

### Explanation and Analysis

When Ruiz is describing how humans come to believe what we do, he defines these beliefs as “agreements,” which forms the crux of his argument throughout the rest of the book. According to Ruiz, humans tend to think that beliefs are facts or truths that we learn from others (like the belief that we are made of matter, the belief that trees are made of wood, the belief that killing is wrong, and so on). Ruiz argues, however, that a belief is actually an agreement. It’s an *agreement to believe* something, or an *agreement to act* in a certain way. This claim is very important for Ruiz, because *The Four Agreements* rests on showing the reader how they can change their lives by forming new agreements with themselves about how they will act and what they will believe.

Ruiz emphasizes that as children, humans believe blindly: we don’t question the beliefs we are taught because we trust our caregivers, so we don’t realize that we agreed to believe what we are told as children. Living a happier life thus entails acknowledging the power that all people have to choose different agreements: to change what they do every day, and to believe different things about the world that will make them happier.

☞ I call this process *the domestication of humans*. And through this process we learn now to live and how to dream.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

As Ruiz describes how humans come to believe what we do, he explains that children are taught what to believe and how to act by the adults around them. These include parents, teachers, and governments. Based on what they are taught, children adopt a belief system about how the world functions. Ruiz defines this as learning “how to dream,” by which he means learning how to perceive the world the way society does, and learning how to live according to society’s expectations. Ruiz calls this learning process “the domestication of humans” because he believes children are trained in a similar way that animals are: children are rewarded for “good” behavior and punished for “bad” behavior. Eventually, they start seeking rewards and fearing punishment, so they stop being “wild” and doing what brings them happiness in the moment. Instead, they start acting in ways that will earn rewards (meaning attention) and avoid punishment (meaning rejection). In other words, they become “domesticated”—and, in doing so, they relinquish their freedom and happiness by the time they’re adults.

☞ We are so well trained that we are our own domesticator. We are an autodomesticated animal.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Victim , Judge

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 8-9

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz describes how children become indoctrinated to act according to the rules of society. He has just explained that children are “trained” like animals by their caregivers who reward them for “good” behavior and punish them for “bad” behavior. Now, he explains that as children become adults, they start to self-regulate their behavior, or become their “own domesticator.” Instead of being rewarded or punished for their behavior by others, they start to reflect on their own behavior to see if they are acting according to society’s rules, they reward themselves when they comply, and they

punish themselves when they fall short. According to Ruiz, each adult has an inner “Judge” persona who critiques their behavior and an inner “Victim” persona who feels shame and fear in response. In this way, the domestication process is essentially internalized and becomes automatic, so that the individual lives in a constant cycle of judgment and fear.

☛ The Judge decrees, and the Victim suffers the guilt and the punishment. But who says there is justice in this dream?

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Victim , Judge

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 11-12

### Explanation and Analysis

Having just explained that children are trained to behave according to society’s rules and that they eventually internalize the system of punishment and reward for behavior, Ruiz now explains that when people start to regulate their own behavior according to society’s rules, the essentially develop two perpetual inner voices: the first voice is “the Judge,” who constantly evaluates a person’s behavior and criticizes the person if they fall short of the social rules they have internalized (which Ruiz calls the “Book of Law”). The second voice is “the Victim,” who receives criticism from the judge and feels shame, guilt, and misery in response. Together, the Judge, the Victim, and the Book of Law rule a person’s life: the person fears being judged and feeling ashamed so much that they act in ways that will avoid judgment, entirely out of fear. The “dream” in which these voices have authority is the perception of reality in which social rules are the ones that matter, and failing to comply with society’s expectations merits severe punishment.

For Ruiz, living as such is unjust because it severely limits human expression. People are constantly afraid of doing what they want because they dread hearing what the Judge has to say about it and suffering as the Victim when the Judge disapproves. Ruiz’s entire aim in *The Four Agreements* is to silence the Judge and the Victim and throw out the Book of Law, meaning he wants to teach people how to stop constantly judging and berating their own behavior and triggering their own suffering.

☛ Our image of perfection is the reason we reject ourselves; it is why we don’t accept ourselves the way we are, and why we don’t accept others the way they are.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Victim , Judge

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has just explained that in adulthood, humans self-regulate their behavior according to society’s expectations by developing two inner voices called the Judge and the Victim. Here, he explains why the Judge and the Victim cause human existence to be full of suffering. The problem, for Ruiz, is that people are conditioned to spend their lives trying to meet society’s expectations, which means they try to be perfect versions of themselves that always act in ways that are acceptable by society—but humans aren’t perfect. We inevitably fall short. And every time a person fails to live up to their own standards, the Judge berates the person (the person tells themselves they are not good enough) and the Victim feels ashamed (the person feels sorry for themselves because they believe they are not good enough).

Together, the Judge and the Victim cause the person to constantly criticize themselves and feel inadequate, which makes people reject themselves (by way of the Judge), feel disempowered (by way of the Victim), and live an existence of misery and suffering that they feel powerless to change. Ruiz’s aim in *The Four Agreements* is to show people how to break out of this cycle of self-blame, self-rejection, and suffering by empowering them to believe the exact opposite: they are already good enough, they can love themselves exactly as they are, and they have the freedom to pursue what really makes them happy.

## Chapter 2. The First Agreement Quotes

☛ The first agreement is to *be impeccable with your word*.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has just explained his view that humans are trapped in

an existence ruled by fear and suffering, dictated by our fear of self-judgment and the pain of self-rejection. He believes that humans can change this pattern by agreeing to behave according to four rules of thought and behavior, which he calls the four agreements. Ruiz thinks that together, these agreements will eliminate all behavior that stems from a place of fear. Here, Ruiz articulates the first agreement, which is to “*be impeccable with your word.*”

The first agreement is a commitment to never say anything out of fear. In essence, being “impeccable with your word” means never saying anything negative about others, because negative statements originate from the desire to make others look bad because a person fears being judged as worse than others. The first agreement is also a commitment to stop saying negative things to oneself. Every time a person feels inadequate and wants to tell themselves they are not good enough—not smart enough, pretty enough, tall enough, etc.—they agree to stop and tell themselves they are already good enough just the way they are. Ruiz believes this agreement shifts a person’s mindset away from saying things out of fear and toward saying things out of love—for others and for the self. Because Ruiz believes that love is exactly what everyone is, avoiding negative commentary brings a person closer to their true nature and closer to the experience of self-love, and thus closer to the experience universal love, which they will begin to see in everyone else as well.

☞ When we see the world through a computer virus, it is easy to justify the cruelest behavior.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Judge

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 41

#### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz is explaining the first agreement (of four) that he believes can turn a person’s existence from a fear-based one to a love-based one. In this quote, he explains that the first agreement—to “be impeccable with your word”—includes agreeing not to gossip about other people. Ruiz believes that gossip is rooted in fear: people tend to say negative things about others to make them look bad because they fear being seen as worse in comparison. For Ruiz, however, gossip is like a “computer virus,” and the person’s mind is like

the computer.

Just as a virus uses the same language as the computer’s programs but has a harmful intent, so does gossip use the same language as the rest of a person’s mind but has a detrimental effect. When a computer virus infects a computer—or, when gossip infects the mind—it changes the way the computer functions, meaning it warps the way a person sees reality. They start to believe the negative commentary about other people is true and subsequently act in ways that are ultimately harmful to themselves. When a person talks badly about others, they are implicitly inviting judgment back about themselves, which makes it harder to silence their internal tendency to judge and berate their own behavior.

### Chapter 3. The Second Agreement Quotes

☞ The second agreement is *don’t take anything personally.*

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Judge

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 47

#### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz believes that a person can transform their life by making four agreements, or committing to four rules of behavior. He has just explained the first commitment, which is to “be impeccable with your word” (or, never say negative things to yourself or other people). Now, he outlines the second agreement, which is “don’t take anything personally.”

Essentially, Ruiz believes that comments from other people are never about the recipient. Rather, comments from others only reflect the “dream” that other people see. For example, a person who calls somebody else ugly believes that the other person is not beautiful enough according to society’s standards of beauty, and is therefore making a judgment on that basis. People who say negative things about others also usually want to seem better in comparison because they fear being judged themselves. For Ruiz, agreeing not to take anything personally means agreeing not to see the world the way somebody else sees it. If a person accepts that they are already good enough just the way they are, another person’s comments—whether negative or positive—are simply irrelevant.

## Chapter 4. The Third Agreement Quotes

☞ The third agreement is *don't make assumptions*.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz believes that a person can stop living in misery if they agree to behave according to four rules, or agreements for behavior. He has just outlined his second rule, which is an agreement to never take things personally. Now, he addresses his third agreement, which is the agreement to never make assumptions. Ruiz believes that people tend to make assumptions—about what somebody else thinks, what somebody else should know about them, or what they are capable of doing—because they are afraid to express themselves. They are afraid to ask for clarity (when they are not sure about something) and to communicate their own needs (instead of assuming somebody else should just know what they need) because they fear being ridiculed.

Ruiz argues that assumptions create false expectations that often result in disappointment. A person might assume somebody likes them and then feel disappointed when the other person doesn't pursue them. For instance, a wife might assume her husband knows she is upset and then be disappointed when he doesn't comfort her—but really, he wife's distress is caused by her own assumption, not by any fault of the husband for not being a mind-reader. This is just one example of the myriad needless misunderstandings that stem from the fear of asking and explaining. Not making assumptions, thus, means making a commitment to summon the courage to express oneself.

will eradicate a fear-based existence. He has just explained that his third agreement, which is to never make assumptions, entails a commitment to express oneself without fear. Now, he articulates his fourth agreement, which is to “always do your best.” For Ruiz, doing “your best” means a number of things, including committing to everything you do and giving it your full energy and attention when you do it, focusing on the effort you make and not the outcome, accepting that your best will change depending on your energy and mood, and acknowledging your effort is good enough. The fourth agreement, thus, orients a person to accept themselves for trying rather than judging themselves for failing or succeeding. In essence, Ruiz believes that by always putting in one's best effort—and by realizing that one's “best” changes depending on different situational factors—a person effectively eliminates the need to judge themselves, since they'll know that there's nothing more they could have done given the circumstances.

☞ “If you meditate four hours a day, perhaps you will transcend in ten years.”

[...]

“If you meditate eight hours a day, perhaps you will transcend in twenty years.”

**Related Characters:** Master (speaker), Miguel Ruiz, Man

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 77

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz is in the process of explaining the fourth and final agreement that he wants the reader to adopt, which is to agree to “always do your best.” Here, he explains that the agreement also entails agreeing not to overdo it, through a story about a man who wants to meditate and transcend to an existence of bliss. The man asks a Buddhist master how long he should meditate for to achieve his goal. Here, the master responds that the man will actually achieve his goal faster if he meditates for fewer hours each day. If the man meditates all the time, he will be exhausted, frustrated, and miserable, which takes his mindset further from bliss than closer to it. Through this anecdote, Ruiz drives home that agreeing to always doing your best also means agreeing to acknowledge and respect your limits, and to commit to doing what you are capable of to the best of your ability,

## Chapter 5. The Fourth Agreement Quotes

☞ The fourth agreement is about the action of the first three: *Always do your best*.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 63

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz is in the process of articulating four agreements—or commitments to behave in certain ways—that he believes

instead of trying to push yourself to do more and judging yourself when you fail. Essentially, Ruiz pushes the reader to accept their own limitations, which entails accepting themselves just as they are and loving themselves for what they *can* do instead of punishing themselves for what they *can't* do.

☝ I did my best.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Victim, Judge

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 80

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz is in the midst of explaining what the fourth agreement—the commitment to “always do your best”—means. Here, he expands on why the fourth agreement helps a person achieve the larger goal of silencing their inner tendencies to judge, berate, reject, and disempower themselves. Ruiz explains that people will not always succeed at what they want to achieve—after all, no human being is perfect. Even when a person agrees to adopt the four agreements, they will sometimes slip up and catch themselves speaking or acting in a negative or self-destructive way. When this happens, a person’s inner Judge and Victim personas try to take over and tell the person they are a failure. In this instance, Ruiz’s advice to the reader is to simply respond to these inner voices with “I did my best.” This statement silences the Judge and the Victim and encourages the person to put the issue to rest and try again, instead of dwelling on their failure and giving up, which is counterproductive.

## Chapter 6. The Toltec Path to Freedom Quotes

☝ We are still children, but we have lost our freedom.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has just finished outlining his titular four agreements, which are four commitments he encourages the reader to

make in order to transform their existence into a happier and more fulfilled one. Now, Ruiz addresses the topic of freedom. Ruiz believes that very young children embody the experience of freedom: they do what they want, they enjoy themselves, and they express themselves without fear. For Ruiz, these are all “natural human tendencies,” but humans stop acting according to their natural tendencies because they become indoctrinated by adults to act according to society’s rules, and these rules limit their freedom—essentially, becoming indoctrinated to follow society’s standards encourage people to judge and berate themselves when they inevitably fail to live up to those standards. Given this fear of behaving incorrectly, adults tend to act for the benefit of society rather than for themselves. Adults fear being judged and rejected by others, so they limit their behavior to avoid criticism—meaning they give up their freedom to be like children, or to do what they want without fear.

☝ A Toltec becomes wise, becomes wild, and becomes free again.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 100

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has outlined four agreements—which are agreements to behave in specific ways that people can choose to adopt in order to experience happiness in their lives. Here, he explains that honoring the four agreements allows a person to undo the indoctrination they received as young children, which taught them to act according to society’s rules. For Ruiz, the indoctrination process—in which a person learns social rules and agrees to act in accordance with them—is a process of “domestication” which transforms a person from a carefree child into an adult who self-regulates their behavior based on society’s rules. Ruiz’s advice for living a happier life, then, is to shift out of a domesticated mindset (in which a person acts based on society’s rules) and back into the “wild” mindset that all children are born with (in which a person acts based on their own desires). Becoming wild—or childlike—enables the person to once again be “free,” or to act according to one’s own desires without fear, which is what it means to embody the Toltec wisdom of which Ruiz is a *nagual* (“master”).

☛ The parasite dreams through your mind and lives its life through your body. It survives on the emotions that come from fear, and thrives on drama and suffering.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Victim, Judge

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 102

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has just explained that the Toltec way of life entails reconnecting with one's inner child, or learning how to experience life the way a child does when they express themselves and pursue their desires without fear. Earlier, Ruiz explained that children get taught to behave differently as they age, because they are conditioned to privilege society's expectations over their own personal desires. Here, Ruiz characterizes this conditioning as a "parasite" that takes over the mind and controls a person's behavior. The parasite is comprised of a person's inner Judge (the voice that criticizes them for falling short of social expectations), inner Victim (the voice that feels ashamed and disempowered by the Judge's criticism), and the Book of Law (the rules of society). The "parasite" feeds off of fear, meaning that the system of judging oneself according to social expectations is perpetuated by fear: people are afraid to do what they really want because they fear rejection from society. Ruiz argues that the only way to experience freedom is to "kill" the parasite by starving it of fear. When a person extinguishes the fear of social rejection, they destroy the parasite within, and are free once again to do what they want and be happy, just as they did when they were children.

☛ If we surrender to the angel of death we will be happy forever.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 121

### Explanation and Analysis

Ruiz has been discussing what it means to be free, which he equates with acting freely and in line with a person's own desires, without fear. He has just described three ways that

fear can be eliminated, and the third one entails "surrender" to the "angel of death." Here, Ruiz means that when a person becomes aware of their own mortality, they will have the courage to seize their freedom to act, because they acknowledge that they might not be here tomorrow. In other words, they acknowledge that the "angel of death" can take their life whenever it wants and that life is a gift, which gives them the courage to do what they want with the time they have, pursue their own desires without fear, and be happy. As such, Ruiz drives home that a crucial part of adopting the four agreements is ridding oneself of the negative agreements that no longer serve them. By recognizing one's mortality, one is better able to look at life from a perspective of gratitude rather than one of dread, since adopting this mindset will allow a person to enjoy the short life they have rather than wasting it on negativity, judgment, and fear.

## Chapter 8. Prayers Quotes

☛ And then the old man opens his own chest, takes out his heart with that beautiful flame inside, and he puts that flame your own heart.

**Related Characters:** Miguel Ruiz (speaker), Teacher, Old Man

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

In the closing passage of *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz recites two prayers. This quote occurs in the final prayer, "for love," which contains a story that is intended to help a person connect with the experience of universal love and recognize that the true nature of everyone and everything in the universe (including the reader) is no different from love itself. This prayer contains a story about an old man who gives the reader a flame that the old man received from his own teacher. The flame is a symbolic representation of universal love: it ignites and spreads to the body, the mind, out into the world, and beyond, to the rest of the universe. Ruiz uses this image to drive home how all of humanity is an embodiment of the divine, which means that we all deserve respect and love. The recognition of the symbolic flame in one's heart is the recognition of one's true nature as the flame, which is love itself: the fabric of all existence.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## THE TOLTEC

The Toltec were a society of scholars who were centered around Teotihuacan (near Mexico City) thousands of years ago. The *naguals* (“masters”) of Toltec wisdom held ancient knowledge about a way of life focused on happiness and love, which they were forced to conceal and protect from conquest and misuse of power. This way of life managed to be preserved and passed down through subsequent generations of *naguals*, and the same knowledge is being shared here by a modern-day *nagual* named Don Miguel Ruiz.

*Ruiz explains that the Toltec way of life is centered on cultivating happiness and love. The fact that The Four Agreements is based on indigenous knowledge that has been passed down over thousands of years gives the book a sense of wisdom and credibility. Ruiz aims to provide instructions for how a person can transform their existence into a happier one.*



## INTRODUCTION: THE SMOKEY MIRROR

Three thousand years ago, a student studying to be a medicine man sleeps in a cave and has an out of body experience in a dream, through which he realizes “I am made of light. I am made of stars.” The student realizes that everything is made of light, which is alive, and it is one being spread throughout the universe. He calls the stars “tonal” and the light between them—including himself—“nagual.” The student concludes that “Everything is God,” and that human perception is “light perceiving light.” The student decides that matter is like a mirror, a **dream**, or smoke that occludes humanity’s real nature, which is “pure love, pure light.”

*Ruiz utilizes the myth of the medicine student to explain the picture of reality that Ruiz is going to defend: even though it looks like people are separate and made of matter, everything is actually made of light that shines universal love. The metaphor of a dream represents the world as humans perceive it, which for Ruiz is an illusion. The aim of his argument is to shake loose the illusion that the dream represents.*



After the student’s realization, he recognizes himself in everything he sees, from other people to clouds. He perceives that life as we know it manifests as varied mixtures of the tonal (starlight) and the nagual (light between the stars). Suddenly, the student feels an overwhelming sensation of peace and wants to share his vision but he cannot not communicate it adequately. Nonetheless, others notice a change in the student’s demeanor: he radiates beauty and doesn’t judge anyone. Other people think the student might be an incarnation of God, and the student says that he is—but so is everybody else. The student can see himself in everyone else, but they can’t see themselves in him.

*Another core claim that Ruiz makes about the nature of reality is that everything in the universe is one entity. Everything is connected, including God, meaning that everyone and everything is a manifestation of God. This belief stands in direct contrast to the common modern-day worldview in which people are different from, inferior to, or judged by a deity of some sort. Since everything in the universe is one being, the tonal (light in the stars) and nagual (light between the stars) are like two sides of the same coin.*



The student concludes that everyone is dreaming and can't see their true nature because of the fog or smoke between them, meaning the layer of interpretation that humans add to reality. So as not to forget his insights, the student decides to call himself the "Smokey Mirror." This name represents the idea that mirrors are people who **dream** up interpretations of reality that occlude the true picture. Their interpretations are the dreams, or the smoke, that stop them from seeing themselves as the light that comprises everything.

*Ruiz argues that since most people don't grow up believing that everything (including God) is one being made of light, people have a flawed picture of reality that obscures this truth, replacing it with a picture of reality as something full of very different beings that are made of matter rather than light. Once again, the metaphor of a dream is used to represent this illusion.*



## CHAPTER 1. DOMESTICATION AND THE DREAM OF THE PLANET

Ruiz believes that everything humanity perceives is a **dream**. The mind perpetually dreams. The dreams are framed in a linear way when we are awake and in a nonlinear way when we are asleep—but in both cases, we are still dreaming. Humans are born with the capacity to dream, and we are taught to dream in the way that society dreams ("the dream of the planet"). We learn to dream like society by focusing our attention on the authority figures that teach us, like our parents, teachers, and religious officiants. The "dream of the planet" includes concepts like what to believe, how to behave, what's good and bad, what's beautiful and ugly, and many other things. These concepts "hook" us through language, which is like a code full of agreements that we all understand.

*Here, Ruiz extends his dream metaphor to explain that belief systems can be changed. A dream stands for human perception: humans learn to perceive and understand the world according to what they're told by others ("the dream of the planet"). This socially-enforced worldview includes beliefs about what exists as well as how to behave, which means that people are conditioned to act in certain ways rather than making their own choices. However, Ruiz likens beliefs and language to agreements to show that humans always have a choice about what we agree to, and can change our beliefs at any time.*



Ruiz calls this process "the domestication of humans." Domestication teaches us how to live and what to believe. As children, we are domesticated the same way animals are: by a system of punishment and reward. When children do what adults want, they are rewarded with attention (for example, the adult says things like "good girl"). Fearing punishment (rejection) and craving reward (attention) makes us act the way others act. Eventually, we become so good at this that we no longer need our parents to domesticate us or teach us to "**dream**" in a certain way. We learn to domesticate ourselves by punishing ourselves when we don't follow the rules and rewarding ourselves when we do.

*Ruiz explains how people are indoctrinated to adopt a particular belief system, a process he calls "domestication" because he believes that children are both wild and free before they learn to behave according to certain belief systems. His aim is to undo the domestication process and teach people how to be free again. Ruiz finds the domestication method of punishment and reward problematic because he believes it damages the human psyche.*



Ruiz says that when human beings are domesticated, we internalize all our "agreements" into a mental "Book of Law" which we use to constantly judge ourselves and others. When we judge ourselves, part of ourselves is a "Victim" who believes we are not good enough, and part of ourselves is a "Judge" who reinforces that "Yes, you are not good enough." When we break the rules in our internal book, we experience fear, blame, guilt, and shame. When we comply, we feel safe.

*Ruiz argues that people learn to talk to themselves in their minds and that the internal voices that develop from the system of punishment and reward are critical and negative: one voice judges and the other feels shame for being judged. Together, the two voices make a person feel perpetually inadequate, which disconnects them from the feeling of love and therefore prevents them from perceiving truth.*



For Ruiz, “true justice” is only paying once for each mistake we make, but domestication makes us pay many times for our mistakes. We judge ourselves when we make a mistake, but also every time we remember a mistake and every time somebody else reminds us of our mistake. Effectively, we feel perpetually guilty and constantly punish ourselves or create “emotional poison.” Ruiz believes that 95 percent of the agreements we have internalized are false and that “we suffer because we believe all these lies.”

Furthermore, people’s individual **dreams** may differ, but the “dream of the planet”—on a global level—is characterized by fear, injustice, violence, and war. Essentially, it’s a “nightmare” that’s controlled by fear. In fact, the “dream of human society” sounds quite a bit like the “hell” that many religions speak of—both are places of fear, suffering, punishment, and pain. We also learn to dream “hell” or “nightmares” in our personal dreams when we experience jealousy, hatred, and fear.

We are all searching for truth, justice, and beauty, because it is absent in our personal and social nightmares. The problem is that these things are already within and around us, but we can’t see them because the agreements and beliefs we have stored within us—or the **dream** that we have been taught—obscures our vision and we live in a “fog.” Ruiz thinks everything that humans believe we are is an illusion which restricts our freedom.

Ruiz believes that we create an idea of perfection based on what will please others, like our parents and our society. We inevitably fail to live up to this idea so we hide behind masks (to avoid rejection from others) and punish or abuse ourselves for failing to be perfect. In fact, Ruiz believes that nobody abuses us more than we abuse ourselves. Even our relationships are just toleration of abuse: if somebody abuses us less than we abuse ourselves, we’ll tolerate the relationship. Otherwise, we won’t. If we abuse ourselves a lot, we’ll even tolerate humiliation and violence from others. All this abuse stems from our image of perfection—because we fail to meet it, we can’t accept ourselves or others the way we are.

*Since Ruiz believes that everyone is made of light and love, agreements (or beliefs about how to behave) that create the habit of mental suffering are based in lies: they deny a person the ability to connect with their true, loving self. The key, then, to reorienting a person toward their true nature is by targeting the false agreements (or beliefs) they were taught as a child.*



*The collective human worldview (the “dream” of human society, or the “dream of the planet”) consists of rules and codes to live by that most people share in common, including laws and social expectations. Even though Ruiz calls the collective worldview one dream, he clarifies here it’s actually billions of individual personal dreams that all look similar because they share the similar beliefs about what is true and right.*



*The common beliefs that most people have—when they perceive the world the way most other people do—are problematic because they limit a person’s ability to act on the basis of love, which restricts their behavior and therefore their freedom. Ruiz argues that because these beliefs are false because they disconnect a person from the experience of love, which he considers to be the highest truth.*



*Ruiz argues that one of the central false beliefs most people share is the idea that a person needs to be perfect in order to be worthy of love from themselves or others. Ruiz believes this idea of perfection is false because a person is already made of love and therefore already worthy. For Ruiz, the association of perfection with worthiness is tantamount to self-abuse: it demands that a person hate themselves for being imperfect instead of loving and accepting themselves as being good enough.*



Each person—including you—makes thousands of agreements with others, including your parents, partners, children, God, and society. However, the most important ones are the agreements you make with yourself in which you tell yourself who you are, what you believe, and what you're capable of doing. Your agreements with yourself comprise your personality. Ruiz thinks that if you want to live a joyful, fulfilled, and empowered life, you must be brave enough to break the agreements that are based in fear.

Ruiz argues that humans are born with a certain amount of power that rebuilds every night. We usually spend all our power on keeping the agreements we have made, so we feel powerless and trapped in “the **dream** of the planet.” But if we don't like our lives, we need to change the agreements we keep. Ruiz proposes that there are “four very powerful agreements” that will break apart the other fear-based agreements that use up all our energy—but it takes a lot of mental resolve to adopt them. Ruiz believes it's worth it, though, as adopting them will return all our spent energy to us and our lives will be transformed. We can replace the “dream of hell” that we live in by creating a new dream of “heaven.”

*Ruiz characterizes holding beliefs as making agreements to behave certain ways toward others and toward oneself. He implies here that the key to living a better life is breaking harmful or limiting agreements and instead agreeing to act in a more positive way toward others and toward oneself. Ruiz's central target is behavior that is rooted in fear.*



*Because the task of changing one's entire belief system seems daunting, Ruiz reassures the reader here that every person already has the power they need to make a change. If a person changes their beliefs (or agreements to behave a certain way), they will free up their personal energy and power because it won't be depleted by the cycle of suffering that he wants to dismantle. Doing so will be hard at first but get progressively easier as more and more energy is freed up by the process of change.*



## CHAPTER 2. THE FIRST AGREEMENT: BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD

The “first agreement” Ruiz believes to be necessary is both simple and powerful: “be impeccable with your word.” Ruiz thinks this is the most challenging of the four agreements to uphold—but if you *can* uphold it, it's enough to turn your reality into “heaven on earth.” Ruiz believes that you express your creative power through “your word.” Everything you believe about what you are, what you **dream**, and what you feel is conjured by your word. Your word is a magical “force” that creates your reality—it can create a beautiful dream (when you're “impeccable” with it) or an ugly dream (when you misuse it).

Ruiz compares words to magic that can put us under a spell or release us from a spell. For example, if you are told you are stupid during your domestication, you will always believe that, or be under that spell. All it takes to break the spell is somebody to “hook your attention” and tell you that you're not stupid, which enables you to make a new agreement. On the other hand, if you are surrounded by people who say you are stupid, the original agreement is reinforced and grows stronger and harder to break.

*For Ruiz, the way a person talks to themselves (in their head) and to others (out loud) is incredibly powerful because language is how people shape their own realities and influence other people's experiences. His first piece of advice, therefore, centers on changing the way a person talks, or uses their “word,” by curbing the tendency to speak negatively about others.*



*Ruiz explains why words are so important: if a person is told something about themselves by lots of people (say, that they are stupid) they tend to believe it. In other words, they agree to uphold the same belief that other people have agreed to uphold. Therefore, Ruiz believes that talking to people in a certain way is a central part of why people have the damaging beliefs they do.*



The word “impeccable” means not going against yourself. For example, if someone call you stupid, the person is not just harming you—they’re also harming themselves, because the person is sending toxic judgment, or “emotional poison” out, which encourages you to judge the person in return. If, however, a person love themselves, they will express that love toward others and they will receive love in return. For Ruiz, being “impeccable with your word” means always using your words to generate “truth and love for yourself.” It’s a very difficult agreement to uphold because we are indoctrinated to use words in the opposite way: to judge, to blame, to hate, and to create divisions between people, families, races, and nations. These misuses of words create fear and reinforce the “**dream** of hell.”

Misusing words is “black magic” that puts us under fear-driven spells. For example, a mother may come home from work with a headache to an energetic daughter who’s happy and singing. The mother can’t tolerate the noise so she snaps and says, “Shut up! You have an ugly voice,” The mother’s misuse of words in this instance has the power to cast a spell on the girl that spirals into her becoming afraid to use her voice and developing a complex about the way she sounds. This could cause the girl to become shy and withdrawn, lack self-confidence, and so on. Because the mother misuses words (uses “black magic”), her daughter makes an agreement not to express herself in order to be accepted and loved. Ruiz says that we often use “black magic” on people we love without realizing it.

The worst kind of “black magic” is gossip. If the human mind is like a computer, then gossip is a **computer virus** that warps the way the computer functions. Ruiz says to imagine that you’re excited about a new class but that you bump into a student who says the professor is a “jerk” without explaining why (maybe the student just want revenge for a bad grade, for example). The other student’s comments affect the way you see the professor, which in turn makes you hate the class and spread similar gossip about the professor. If you imagine this kind of misinformation going on all the time, humans are getting a warped version of reality or functioning as if they have a virus that crowds their computer systems (minds) with “the chaos of a thousand different voices.”

*Ruiz uses “impeccable” to mean only using words that express or manifest love and positivity (which is the opposite of how society usually trains people to talk). Agreeing to be “impeccable with your word,” therefore, means agreeing not to say anything negative, divisive, or judgmental. A person who says judgmental things about others invites judgment back, so talking negatively about others also manifests self-hatred: it implies that’s it’s okay for them to judge people and for people to judge them, which reinforces their tendency to judge themselves.*



*Ruiz uses the terms “black magic” and “misusing words” to mean lying: distance from love is distance from the truth (because, according to the Ruiz, everyone is made of love), so talking negatively to somebody is like lying to them. Talking to anybody in a way that is judgmental, critical, or negative also reinforces that person’s own inner “Judge” and inner “Victim.” It makes those voices stronger, which distances that person from self-acceptance and self-love.*



*The computer virus is a symbol for negative talk about other people, which Ruiz calls gossip. Negative talk about another person (say, the professor in Ruiz’s example) encourages others to see the other person negatively: it spreads and takes control of a person’s perception the way a virus takes control of a computer, altering what the user sees. This is ultimately damaging to the “user” (or the person who spreads gossip, in Ruiz’s example) because it limits their ability to use the “computer”—to use their mind in a clear, focused, and productive way.*



Ruiz challenges you to think about how many times you misinform yourself by telling yourself how imperfect you are—say, by thinking about how fat, ugly, stupid, or old you are. Then think about how often you gossip about the people you love to justify your opinions. Ruiz thinks that if you become “impeccable with your words,” your tendency to gossip will eventually be eradicated and your mind will no longer be “fertile ground” for “black magic.” You can measure how impeccable you are with your word by how much self-love you have, which makes you feel “happy and at peace.”

Ruiz is planting the seed for you to accept the first agreement in your mind. He believes that if you nurture it—by using the word to share love, or by using “white magic”—you can transcend “hell.” It starts with telling yourself how wonderful you are and how much you love yourself, which will start to break the agreements that make you suffer. It’s possible, Ruiz says, because he did it, and he’s “no better than you.” He really believes that the first agreement, if you can accept it, will manifest freedom and transform your existence from “hell” to “heaven on earth.”

*Gossip, or negative talk about others, is also problematic because seeing others in a negative way tends to have a rebound effect: it makes a person see lots of things negatively, including themselves. When a person starts love and accept themselves instead of criticizing and rejecting themselves, it means the agreement to speak impeccably is changing their worldview—the person starts to believe that there is love in the world, and therefore that there’s also something worthy of love within themselves.*



*Ruiz believes that the first agreement helps a person to experience freedom because people are often afraid to do things because they fear of what people will say about them (and how they might berate themselves in their own heads). Freedom, therefore, means freedom from fear—the freedom to act out of love without fear of rejection.*



### CHAPTER 3. THE SECOND AGREEMENT: DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY

The rest of the agreements follow from the first agreement. The second agreement is “don’t take anything personally.” For example, if a person doesn’t know you but they call you “stupid,” that’s really about the person and not about you. You might wonder how the person knows this about you, and if everyone can see that too. When you think in that way, however, you’re agreeing with the person—or, taking it personally—and you start becoming trapped in “the **dream** of hell.” You get trapped because of “personal importance”: you think everything is about you.

Ruiz believes that “nothing other people do is because of you.” They do things because of their **dream** in their own mind, which is completely different from your dream in your mind. Even direct personal insults have nothing to do with you: they come from the other person’s agreements, their programming during domestication. Taking something personally is like taking someone else’s “emotional garbage” and making it your own. If, however, you don’t take anything personally, you’re “immune” from their “poison” and from “hell.”

*While the first agreement focuses on how a person talks about other people, the second agreement focuses on how a person responds to comments made by others. It builds on the first agreement, as it aims to stop people from retaliating when criticized by others (when others aren’t impeccable with their word), by showing them that other people’s criticisms are never the truth.*



*Because others might be trapped in a negative (false) worldview, it’s important to remember that the negative things others say about you are not true—their opinions say nothing about you and everything about them. A negative comment really only captures another person’s false worldview, it doesn’t have anything to do with the recipient. Taking things personally thus means believing lies.*



Usually, when you take something personally, you're offended and want to defend your own—different—beliefs, which creates conflict. You feel the need to be right and for others to be wrong. But everything you believe just reflects your own agreements (or your own “**dream**”). Instead, Ruiz says you could do as he does, and believe that what somebody else thinks about you is not important to you. You don't take it personally because it's a reflection of their dream, their beliefs, and their problems—not yours. Nothing another person says is about you at all; it's always about them, about the “movie” they play in their mind.

Ruiz believes that when you get mad at someone, hate someone, or are jealous of someone, you are really dealing with your own fear. If you're not afraid, you won't be jealous, or sad, or mad at anyone else because you'll be too busy loving and feeling good. You'll be loving everything around you because you love yourself and you're content with who you are and how you live your life. You'll be in a state of “bliss” in which you love “everything you perceive.”

Even if someone says you're wonderful, it's not about you. You already know you're wonderful—you don't need to listen for others to say it and believe them when they do. The opinions you have about yourself probably came from somebody else, so don't take those personally, either. Ruiz says that when the mind talks to itself, the voices come from what the Toltecs call “Allies” and what other people might call “Gods.” We can choose whether or not to believe—or take personally—what we tell ourselves. Similarly, we can choose whether or not to believe “the **dream** of the planet.”

The mind has the special capability of talking to itself and listening to itself at the same time. When the many different parts of your mind are all speaking simultaneously, you experience a noisy, indecipherable marketplace of conflicting beliefs all arguing with each other. The noise is what makes us feel confused about what we want. The only way to calm this chaos, according to Ruiz, is to make an inventory of our agreements, expose the conflicts among them, and make order out of the chaos.

*For Ruiz, a healthier approach to other people's comments is to disempower those comments: they should have no power over you because they do nothing more than reflect another person's misunderstanding of the world. Negative comments thus reflect a disagreement between the fear-based worldview that most people uphold and the love-based worldview that a person is trying to see themselves through. Since the love-based world view is what's accurate and true, negative comments are really just irrelevant.*



*Ruiz also includes responding with negativity to negative comments as part of taking things personally. Negative responses, however, only reflect the fear of rejection. Agreeing not to take anything personally thus means agreeing not to sink back into a fear-based world view, but to rise above it, and stay in a mindset of self-love or “bliss.”*



*Not taking anything personally also means that a person should also disregard positive comments that others make about them. Even though it might seem that positive comments are a good thing, what they still reflect a judgment (albeit a positive one). Ruiz wants people to cultivate a mode of perception with no judgment at all, only love and acceptance. Positive comments from others, therefore, are redundant in his worldview.*



*Ruiz believes that not taking anything personally is also important because believing what other people say is the same as agreeing to think about oneself the way other people do, which creates a lot of unnecessary agreements. His aim is to reduce the noise of all the agreements people keep, in order to let themselves have energy for other things.*



Another reason not to take things personally is because it makes us suffer unnecessarily. Ruiz believes humans are hooked on suffering and agree to help each other suffer. When you are surrounded by people who lie to you, you also start lying to yourself. Ruiz cautions that you shouldn't believe what other people tell you because they also lie to themselves—it's better to trust yourself and choose whether or not to believe what you are told by others. When someone lies to you, it's because they're afraid, and if you can see them as afraid you'll realize they're not perfect. If you can make it a habit not to take things personally, your anger, jealousy, fear, sadness, and hatred will disappear.

Practicing the second agreement makes you immune to the triggers that “trap you in the **dream** of hell.” It doesn't matter what anyone (or everyone) says about you—you'll be immune because you won't take it personally. Ruiz thinks you should write down the second agreement and stick it on your fridge to remind you all the time to never take things personally. You'll find that you don't need to trust what other people say—you only need to trust yourself. You're never responsible for other people's actions, only for your own. You'll also be able to walk around with your “heart open,” share love, ask for what you need, say yes, and say no without feeling guilty or judging yourself.

## CHAPTER 4. THE THIRD AGREEMENT: DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

When we make assumptions, Ruiz says, we believe they are the truth. We assume we know what other people think or feel and we subsequently blame them and send “emotional poison” their way. Making assumptions just creates problems and drama, and we should avoid doing that. As such, the third agreement is, “don't make assumptions.” Often, we are “afraid to ask for clarification,” so we make assumptions that we defend and base gossip on. We try to prove that we are right and others are wrong, which creates a whole lot of suffering. Ruiz thinks it's always better to ask than to assume.

The chaos in our minds causes us to misinterpret everything: we only see and hear what we want to believe and we **dream** things up all the time that have no basis in reality. For example, imagine you see someone you like in the mall and they smile at you. From this smile you could assume they like you, which might lead you to imagine yourself in a relationship with that person and perhaps to even fantasize about your wedding. We do this sort of thing all the time, Ruiz says.

*Once again, Ruiz argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between what a person says to others and what a person says to themselves. A person who expresses negative comments about others likely also talks thinks negatively about themselves. This means that the person really needs compassion (rather than retaliation) because they are suffering. In other words, for Ruiz, the only appropriate response to negativity is positivity.*



*Once again, Ruiz shows that the second agreement pushes people away from fear and toward freedom. Instead of depleting energy on worrying what people think or doing things to appease others, a person will feel free to say and do what they want. Not taking things personally, like being impeccable with your word, entails taking a step toward personal freedom by distancing yourself from habitually acting based on the fear of judgment from other people.*



*Ruiz's third agreement also focuses on cultivating freedom from fear, because not making assumptions means the same thing as not being afraid to ask for clarity and not being afraid to communicate one's own needs. Agreeing not to make assumptions, therefore, facilitates healthy communication between people and limits the chance of conflict due to misunderstandings.*



*Ruiz's third agreement aims to limit the amount of blind interpretation going on in a person's day to day life so that they don't build false expectations. False expectations are problematic because they give too much power to the perception of reality that a person dreams up—Ruiz wants to flip the script so that people start controlling their perceptions, rather than being controlled by them.*



A lot of problems in relationships come from making assumptions: we often assume our partners know what we're thinking or what we want, and get upset when they don't. We assume that our friends, family, and other important people know us so well that we don't have to communicate what we want, then we get upset when those people don't read our minds. Ruiz thinks we make assumptions because we believe it's not safe to ask questions. Our biggest assumption is thinking that everyone else thinks the way we do. We are afraid to be ourselves around others because we are afraid that they will judge, blame, and criticize us the way we judge, blame, and criticize ourselves.

We also often make assumptions about ourselves that cause internal conflict. For example, you overestimate yourself or underestimate yourself because you haven't taken the time to ask yourself questions about the situation you face. Often, when we get into relationships, we see the things we like about the other person and ignore the things we don't like. We also assume we can change the things we don't like and get upset when the person doesn't change. That isn't real love, according to Ruiz—real love is accepting someone just the way they are. If someone wants to change you, they don't really love you. It's much better to agree that you'll stay with someone if they accept you as you are but that you'll leave if they don't. This may sound harsh, but that style of communication is more “impeccable,” as per the first agreement.

Ruiz says the easiest way to stop making assumptions is to ask questions. You should, he believes, ask as many questions as you need until you are clear—then you won't need to assume anything because you'll already know the truth. You'll be able to communicate clearly, your relationships will change, and your word will be “impeccable.” Instead of assuming someone knows what you want, tell them what you want. Ruiz even thinks that all human problems would be solved if everyone communicated clearly and didn't make assumptions.

It's hard to stop making assumptions because it's our habit to assume. So, first, we need to be aware of habits, then we need to act differently—over and over again—until we form new habits. Ruiz thinks that if you make this agreement a habit, you will transform from a “black magician” into a “white magician” and you'll master your intent, spirit, love, gratitude, and life itself. This mastery, which puts you on the path to freedom, is the goal of the Toltec.

*Ruiz emphasizes that many assumptions are rooted in the fear of communicating. Both the fear of making one's needs known and the fear of asking for clarity about somebody else's needs are rooted in the same fear of being judged for expressing oneself. Self-expression, for Ruiz, is a manifestation of freedom, so agreeing not to assume is also an agreement to express oneself freely and without fear.*



*Ruiz now addresses assumptions that are rooted in overestimating or underestimating one's own abilities (including overestimating how much power a person has to change someone else). These assumptions are problematic because they also trigger false expectations about what a person can do. When personal expectations aren't met, they trigger self-criticism and self-rejection. Expectations in general don't come from a place of love, since true love means accepting a person just the way they already are.*



*Ruiz believes that the fear of communicating (which lies at the root of making assumptions) must be tackled head on. A person has to become comfortable with asking questions—of themselves and others—by doing it so often that their fear starts to dwindle. Asking questions also feeds the first agreement, because the more a person knows about a situation, the less likely they are to say false things about it.*



*Ruiz emphasizes that agreements don't change overnight. People's behaviors need to become habitual, like second nature, for a transformation of their worldview to happen. This takes time and patience, but Ruiz reassures the reader here that it will be worth the effort.*



## CHAPTER 5. THE FOURTH AGREEMENT: ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST

The fourth agreement, “always do your best,” is important because it enables the others to become habits. No matter what the scenario, you should always do your best. It’s crucial to remember, though, that your best will change from moment to moment— your best will be better when you’re well-rested than when you’re tired, or for example. Your best will also depend on your mood. As you build new habits, your best will also evolve.

It’s important to remember that doing your best is not the same as overdoing it. Ruiz explains this with a story about a man who wants to rise above his suffering, so he goes to a Buddhist temple to find a master who can help him. The man asks his Master how long it will take if he meditates four hours a day, and the Master estimates that it will take four years. The man asks how long it will take if he can meditate eight hours a day. To his surprise, the Master says, “twenty years.” The Master explains that if the man can do his best in two hours a day, spending eight hours a day will just make him frustrated and miserable, thereby elongating his suffering.

Ruiz believes that doing your best means being active, productive, and good to yourself, and contributing to your community and society. Doing your best also means acting because you love it, not because you want a reward. A lot of people don’t actually like their work, they just do it to get paid; they suffer all week as they work because they have to, not because they want to. Then, when they get paid, they spend their money on escapism—say, buying alcohol and getting drunk—to forget that they are unhappy and hate their lives. By contrast, when we like what we do, we don’t get bored or frustrated. We are happy.

When you do your best, you also stop your inner “Judge” from blaming you, and you learn to accept yourself. If you start judging yourself, you can respond “I did my best.” When you do your best, you also don’t do it to please the Judge or other people. Doing your best is doing the actions that make you happy and that authentically express what you are. Ruiz explains what he means with the story of Forrest Gump: Forrest didn’t always have amazing ideas but he always took action and did his best at whatever he was doing. His rewards were a bonus but they weren’t the reason he took action. Ruiz equates taking action with being alive and taking the risk to express your **dream**.

*Ruiz’s final agreement centers on tackling a person’s need for perfection. It shifts the focus of doing something away from whether or not it’s achieved and toward simply making a genuine effort. The person essentially agrees to accept themselves for trying, regardless of the outcome, instead of judging themselves for failing and rewarding themselves for succeeding.*



*Through Ruiz’s anecdote about the meditating man and the Master, he emphasizes that “doing your best” is not the same as doing the best. His aim is to stop a person from comparing themselves to others and to themselves at different points in time. Cutting off the tendency to compare stops a person from judging how much they are doing and limits the chance of them inadvertently causing more suffering by overworking themselves.*



*For Ruiz, “doing your best” entails making a shift of attitude away from the rewards of completing a task and toward the pleasure of doing the task itself. If a person tries to do things they enjoy, they are less likely to shirk their responsibilities and cut corners. Ruiz essentially argues that one way in which a person can easily do their best is to focus on doing tasks they love.*



*Ruiz now explains how agreeing to “always do your best” limits the problematic tendency to reject oneself for not being perfect. When a person focuses on the fact that they made their best effort (regardless of the outcome), they silence their inner Judge who focuses on the outcome and not the effort. Doing one’s best thus orients a person toward accepting themselves for trying hard instead of rejecting themselves for failing to succeed.*



Ruiz says that he does his best in every aspect of his life by turning every action into a ritual. When he takes a shower, for instance, he tells his body how much he enjoys the water and he does his best to meet his body's needs and appreciate the sensations it gives him. Ruiz also thinks that letting go of the past and of what you've lost allows you to be alive now and enjoy the **dream** that's happening in this moment. If you dwell on missing someone or something, you're not enjoying what's happening right now and this leads to self-pity and suffering.

For Ruiz, being alive is recognizing life—and God—passing through you. Instead of trying to prove yourself, just be. You have the right to be alive, to be happy, to be you, to say yes when you want to, and to say no when you don't. You don't need others to accept you. You express the God in you by existing, loving yourself, and loving others.

Doing your best is the key to achieving the other agreements. As you try to change your habits, you won't always be impeccable with your word, you will sometimes take things personally, and you might still make the odd assumption—but if you're always doing your best, your habits will change. You'll misuse your words less often, take things less personally over time, and make fewer assumptions as you go. Instead of judging yourself when you fail to keep an agreement, just do your best and you'll feel good about your effort, because "Practice makes the master." Remember, Ruiz says, that you learned everything you know—say, writing, driving, walking, and talking—by repeating actions. Action is what makes change possible.

Ruiz means that you can't just daydream or meditate on the agreements to reap their benefits—you have to *act* by feeding, cleaning, and healing your body; exercising; and doing "what makes your body feel good." You don't have to worship religious idols (like Buddha or Jesus) because your own body is already a "manifestation of God," but you can certainly do so if it makes you feel good. When giving love to all the parts of your body becomes your ritual, you love, respect, and honor yourself and God. You begin to live a **dream** that has no judgment, no victimization, no gossip, and no abuse.

*Ruiz now argues that "always do your best" orients a person toward focusing on the present moment because the emphasis is on the effort (which happens in the moment) and not on the outcome (which involves dwelling on future outcomes and past expectations). Thus, the fourth agreement also encapsulates a commitment to be present in the moment, which Ruiz believes alleviates suffering.*



*Ruiz explains that the fourth agreement, like the other three agreements, allows a person to dismantle fear. This time, the fear of failure is tackled. A person accepting themselves for trying is closer to self-love than a person thinking they need to achieve something in order to be worthy of love.*



*Ruiz ties all four agreements together by showing that because the fourth agreement tackles the fear of failure, it also tackles the fear of failing to uphold the agreements themselves. Even if a person slips up—which is inevitable—they can accept themselves for trying their best and keep going instead of triggering their inner Judge to chime in and tell them that they have failed and that they aren't good enough. The fourth agreement, thus, is set up to help a person cultivate new habits, because it doesn't stop a person in their tracks when they mess up.*



*Shifting one's outlook from a fear-based worldview to a love-based worldview entails taking care of the body and treating it with love. Taking care of the body, for Ruiz, is something like the action-based analogue for prayer or meditation: everybody is God, in his view, so treating the body with care and keeping it functioning is the same thing as honoring a deity.*



Ruiz says it's impossible to "live in hell" when you practice the four agreements, because you'll be 100 percent in control of your life. Toltec wisdom says that together, the four agreements enable to you to master transformation: to "transform hell into heaven," and to transform the "dream of the planet" into your "personal dream." You can do your best to honor the four agreements today, but it takes a strong will to keep honoring them every day because they are in conflict with the agreements that are part of "the dream of the planet." Ruiz says that each time you fail, you shouldn't become the Judge (and criticize yourself) or become the Victim (and feel sorry for yourself). Instead, just tell yourself that you broke the agreement but that you'll try again.

*Ruiz reminds the reader that agreeing to adopt the behaviors he has outlined takes repeated effort every day. To motivate the reader, Ruiz reminds them that the effort is worth it, because adopting the four agreements will eventually enable a person to channel all the energy that they would have been spending on judging and criticizing into the pursuit of their own personal desires, which means doing things they love. Ruiz uses the metaphor of shifting from "hell" into "heaven" to emphasize the impact that his advice will have on a person's life.*



## CHAPTER 6. THE TOLTEC PATH TO FREEDOM: BREAKING OLD AGREEMENTS

Ruiz explains that when we don't feel free, we blame many things, such as the government, the climate, religion, or our parents. But really, the only thing stopping us being free is ourselves—being free is the same thing as being ourselves. Toddlers are free: they do whatever they want to do. They are also "wild": they smile, have fun, and play without caring about the future. Toddlers think only about the present, so they aren't afraid to express what they feel, nor are they afraid to love. These, according to Ruiz, are "normal" human tendencies.

*Ruiz argues that young children are the freest humans because they already live in the way he advocates: they act without fear and pursue their own desires in the moment. Ruiz emphasizes that these behaviors are all "normal" to convince the reader that the way people are gradually conditioned to behave is perverse (and the root of all suffering). The four agreements can thus be thought of as a way to regain the freedom that a child gives up when they are trained to behave according to the social order.*



However, when we become adults, we let the Judge and the Victim take charge. They prevent us from expressing our true nature, and we are no longer happy. Ruiz says that you don't have to blame your parents for domesticating you, since they, too, were domesticated. If they acted abusively it was out of their own fear, their own beliefs. You don't need to blame yourself, either, but you do need to stop the abuse—you can do this by freeing yourself from "the tyranny of the Judge" and the "role of the Victim."

*For Ruiz, the process of domestication—or being trained to act according to society's expectations—is the same thing as abuse because it eradicates a person's freedom and violates their true nature (which is to act out of love, because each person is the same thing as love). This means that learning to silence the inner Judge and the inner Victim is essentially stopping a cycle of abuse.*



Your true self is the little child inside you that comes out when you have fun, play, or express yourself creatively. It's the part of you that doesn't think about the past or the future but just enjoys the present activity. The Judge inhibits this expression by telling you that you have "responsibilities" like earning a living. Ruiz thinks that most people don't even realize that the Judge and the Victim are ruling their lives. The first step to freedom, therefore, is awareness that we are not free. Awareness lets us examine our beliefs and discover that most of them are "based on lies."

*Ruiz argues that personal enjoyment, freedom, and being childlike are fundamentally connected. Paying attention to activities that feel fun can act as a barometer for guiding oneself toward personal freedom. Enjoyable activities are the ones a person wants to do for themselves rather than for society—just as they did when they were children—which will guide them closer to freedom. Ruiz thus reinforces the idea that being free is the same as having childlike fun.*



Being a Toltec, essentially, is taking control of your own **dream**, having the power to change your life if you don't enjoy your dream, and following no leaders but yourself. A Toltec, says Ruiz, is wise, wild, and free. Toltecs possess three types of "mastery": "Awareness" (being aware of our true nature), "Transformation" (changing and freeing ourselves from domestication), and "Intent" (practicing unconditional love, which is the true nature of life itself).

Ruiz compares the Judge, the Victim, and the belief system you are domesticated with to a **parasite**: it sucks your energy in order to keep itself alive. When we realize this, we have a choice: surrender to the parasite and "the **dream** of the planet," or to rebel. Shamans of the Americas call themselves "warriors" because they declare war on "the parasite of the mind." Being a warrior doesn't mean we win, but it means we try our best to fight the parasite. The parasite can also be described like a monster with a thousand heads—one head for each of our fears. Ruiz says there are three ways to kill the parasite and he's going to address each one in turn.

Ruiz names the first way of killing the **parasite** "the art of transformation: the **dream** of the second attention." Domestication is the "dream of the first attention" because the first time you used your attention, it was to create that dream. Now, however, you're not innocent—you can choose what to believe. You can become aware of the fog and the drama in your life by noticing which beliefs limit you and exist out of fear. Those are the ones you need to start disagreeing with by turning your "demons" into "angels." Start small, work your way up, and repeat until you have mastered this task.

Ruiz names the second way of killing the **parasite** "the discipline of the warrior: controlling your own behavior." Imagine you wake up in a good mood but then have a fight with your partner. After the fight you feel drained and spend the rest of the day trying to get back in a good headspace. Emotions deplete your energy. The state of mind in which emotions take over is like a disease, and negative emotions are like wounds that need to be healed through forgiveness. First, we forgive others, then God, then ourselves. Forgiving someone means not having an emotional reaction when you see them. Ruiz instructs you to be like a warrior and learn to control your emotions. Have the discipline to express them at the right time rather than retaliating when provoked or repressing feelings when shamed.

*Ruiz explains that the Toltec way of life (of which Ruiz himself is a nagual, or "master") is focused on cultivating a person's ability to recognize their own power. So far, he has focused on one way that a person can use their power to regain the freedom that they were born with: through the four agreements. Now, Ruiz will summarize three additional methods for cultivating and harnessing one's own power, based on his understanding of the indigenous knowledge of the Toltec.*



*For Ruiz, conquering fear is essential to reclaiming one's own power. Ruiz uses the metaphor of a parasite that feeds off fear to describe the combination of the inner voices that judge, feel self-hatred, and agree to society's belief system. Since Ruiz's aim is to silence the voices and reject the internalized belief system, he argues that a person needs to destroy the parasite by ridding the mind of fear in some way, which is the fuel that keeps the parasite alive.*



*The "dream of the second attention" is the new belief system which Ruiz wants the reader to adopt, whereas the "dream of the first attention" is society's belief system. A person can attain this new belief system by conquering each fear that lives inside them. This is done by facing and dismantling the fears one by one, which will transform them into "angels" (positive expressions of love) instead of "demons" (fears).*



*Ruiz urges the reader to cultivate their ability to choose when and how they express their negative emotions. This requires a lot of discipline, which means the reader must be like a "warrior" who fights every day. Instead of fighting, however, the reader must practice the art of forgiveness over and over again with the same discipline that a warrior applies to training their body to fight. This prevents a person's emotions from taking over and depleting their power, which the person needs in order to change their agreements and adopt a new belief system.*



The third way of killing the **parasite**, Ruiz says, is known as “the initiation of the dead: embracing the angel of death.” In this method, you learn from “death,” which teaches you how to be alive. Ruiz tells you to imagine that your doctor says you have a week to live. You have two options: suffer and feel sorry for yourself or make the most of your last week and really enjoy it. Death teaches you how to make the most of every day, be open and fearless, and cherish being alive. The “initiation of the dead” kills the parasite and allows you to be resurrected alive. The angel of death teaches you that it owns your life and can take it away at any moment, which motivates you use your life while you still have it.

*The metaphor of facing “the angel of death” and killing the parasite within means becoming acutely aware of one’s own mortality and recognizing that life is a fleeting gift. Ruiz believes that keeping this thought in mind will allow the reader to focus on doing what they want in the moment (or express their freedom) instead of worrying about the past (which is no longer here) or the future (which may not come to be).*



## CHAPTER 7. THE NEW DREAM: HEAVEN ON EARTH

Ruiz instructs you to forget everything you’ve ever learned. Your new **dream** starts here. You have the power to change right now. Use your imagination and see love pouring out of the trees, sky, light, and other humans, even when they are in a bad mood. Imagine yourself living a new life in which you are completely free to be your true self and are allowed to be happy. Living this way, you have no conflict with others, no fear of expressing yourself or being judged, and no need to control anybody else. Love yourself, including your body and your emotions just the way they are right now. Living like this is “a state of bliss.” Even if you feel the **parasite** inside you, you can still choose to live in heaven or hell. Ruiz chooses heaven and asks what your choice is.

*Ruiz is essentially asking the reader to acknowledge that reality—including everything in the universe—is an expression of the universal love that connects everything. Asking the reader to imagine this helps them to visualize the reality that they’re unable to see. When a person recognizes this truth, they can live in a “state of bliss.” Once again, Ruiz reinforces the idea that a person has the power to choose a different belief system centered on expressing love instead of fear.*



## CHAPTER 8. PRAYERS

Ruiz tells you to close your eyes and feel all the love emanating from you. Focus on your lungs and feel the pleasure of breathing. The air is love. Feel the pleasure of being alive. Ruiz recites a “prayer for freedom,” addressed to the universe’s creator. He says he knows the creator’s name is “Love.” Ruiz asks for help to love the way the creator does and to accept himself without judgment. He asks the creator to clean his heart of “emotional poison” and gives thanks for the freedom to be who he really is.

*Ruiz calls the universe’s creator “Love” because he believes that all existence (including God, the universe, the planet, and human beings) are united as one being made of light that shines universal love. Thus, the prayer is an expression of intent to act in a way that aligns with this truth, rather than acting out of fear (which fuels a person’s judging and self-rejecting tendencies, or “emotional poison”).*



Ruiz recites a second prayer “for love.” He says you are going to share a **dream** with him, in which you’re walking on a warm, sunny day. You see a kind old man with light coming out of his head. The old man explains that his teacher took a **flame** from his heart and put it in the old man’s heart. The flame grew into a big fire of love and touched his whole body and his mind, along with everything on Earth, the sun, the stars, and the moon. All of these things loved the old man back, and he saw himself in everything. The old man takes a fire out of his chest and puts it in your heart. Now you are radiant with the same light.

*Ruiz symbolizes the nature of reality with a flame that grows and engulfs everything. For Ruiz, everything is made of light that shines universal love. When the old man sees the flame in every object in the universe, he recognizes that he is the same as everything else there is. Everything is not separate—it is all connected, not made of matter but light, and is one and the same expression of universal love, as is the reader.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Naqvi, Erum. "The Four Agreements." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 31 Jan 2020. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Naqvi, Erum. "The Four Agreements." LitCharts LLC, January 31, 2020. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-four-agreements>.

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### MLA

Ruiz, Don Miguel. *The Four Agreements*. Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Ruiz, Don Miguel. *The Four Agreements*. San Rafael, California: Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997.