

## THE BIG IDEAS

### The Domestication

Of humans.

#### 1st Agreement:

Be impeccable with your word.

#### 2nd Agreement:

Don't take anything personally.

#### 3rd Agreement:

Don't make assumptions.

#### 4th Agreement:

Always do your best.

#### The First Step

Toward freedom.

#### We Stop Ourselves

Let's not blame others.

#### Breaking Domestication

Step-by-step.

#### Repetition

Makes the master.



# The Four Agreements

A Toltec Wisdom Book

BY DON MIGUEL RUIZ · AMBER-ALLEN PUBLISHING © 1997 · 138 PAGES

“You need a very strong will in order to adopt the Four Agreements—but if you can begin to live your life with these agreements, the transformation in your life will be amazing. You will see the drama of hell disappear right before your very eyes. Instead of living in a dream of hell, you will be creating a new dream—your personal dream of heaven.”

~ Don Miguel Ruiz from *The Four Agreements*

[The Four Agreements](#). Love ‘em:

“The First Agreement: Be Impeccable with Your Word

The Second Agreement: Don't Take Anything Personally

The Third Agreement: Don't Make Assumptions

The Fourth Agreement: Always Do Your Best”

This is a really simple, really cool, really powerful book—one of the earlier books I read on my own journey and one I think you'll enjoy as well if you haven't already read it!

Let's take a peek at some of the Big Ideas [Don Miguel Ruiz](#) introduces us to in this book of Toltec wisdom, shall we?! :)

## THE DOMESTICATION OF HUMANS

“Children are domesticated the same way that we domesticate a dog, a cat, or any other animal. In order to teach a dog we punish the dog and we give it rewards. We train our children whom we love so much the same way that we train any domesticated animal: with a system of punishment and reward. We are told, ‘You're a good boy,’ or ‘You're a good girl,’ when we do what Mom and Dad want us to do. When we don't, we are a ‘bad girl’ or a ‘bad boy.’”

Ah, the domestication process. :)

In [Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#) (see Notes) [Nietzsche](#) tells us that: “*Society tames the wolf into a dog. And man is the most domesticated animal of all.*”

And, [Carlos Castaneda](#), another great teacher who introduces us to the ancient Toltec wisdom (see Notes on [The Wheel of Time](#)), tells us that the purpose of the warrior (the ideal person in the Toltec tradition) is to transcend social conditioning as we discover our personal power and learn to live with clear intent and impeccability.

The Four Agreements are pretty much an awesome guide on how to do exactly that!

## 1ST AGREEMENT: BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD

“The first agreement is the most important one and also the most difficult one to honor. It is so important that with just this first agreement you will be able to transcend to the level of existence I call heaven on earth. The first agreement is to *be impeccable with your word*. It sounds very simple, but it is very, very powerful.”

*“Death is not the biggest fear we have; our biggest fear is taking the risk to be alive—the risk to be alive and express what we really are.”*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

*"When you make it a strong habit not to take anything personally, you avoid many upsets in your life. Your anger, jealousy, and envy will disappear, and even your sadness will simply disappear if you don't take things personally."*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

Being impeccable with our word. This is big.

First, let's look at how [Ruiz](#) defines the word impeccability: "Impeccability means 'without sin.' Impeccable comes from the Latin *peccatus*, which means 'sin.' The *im* in impeccable means 'without,' so impeccable means 'without sin.' Religions talk about sin and sinners, but let's understand what it really means to sin. A sin is anything that you do which goes against yourself. Everything you feel or believe or say that goes against yourself is a sin. You go against yourself when you judge or blame yourself for anything. Being without sin is exactly the opposite. Being impeccable is not going against yourself. When you are impeccable, you take responsibility for your actions, but you do not judge or blame yourself."

Brilliant.

So when we're impeccable, we don't use our word against ourselves indulging in guilt or shame. We also don't use our word against others in blaming, criticizing or gossiping. We also honor our commitments and only make commitments we intend to follow through on.

How're you doing on those fronts?

In [The Diamond Cutter](#) (see Notes), [Geshe Michael Roach](#) talks about the fact that in Tibet they don't even have a word for "guilt." As he says: "There's no word in Tibetan for 'guilty.' The closest thing is 'intelligent regret that decides to do things differently.'"

[Geshe Roach](#) also describes blame/criticism/complaining/etc. as "useless talk." It depletes us of energy and wires our brains in ways we don't wanna be wired. So, uh, let's get impeccable with our word and stop all blame and criticism—of ourselves and others; and, while we're at it, let's get rid of all the complaining and gossip as well! :)

Now, let's address being impeccable with our word as it relates to commitments.

Do you honor your commitments? When you say you're going to do something, do you \*really\* intend to follow through and then DO you? Or, do you kinda say "Yes" to every request because you think you need to and you figure you can always flake later? We've all said "Yes" too often when a polite "No" would've been more appropriate but let's practice honoring our word and the commitments we make, shall we?!

(While we're on the subject of sin, did you know that, according to Wikipedia: "in the biblical Hebrew, the generic word for sin is *het*. It means to err, to miss the mark. It does not mean to do evil." [Paulo Coelho](#) (see Notes) talks about the fact that to sin, from this perspective, is kinda like an archer missing the bulls-eye. Cool, eh?)

## 2ND AGREEMENT: DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY

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

This is another theme that all the great teachers come back to again and again and again (and again :).

How about some [Marcus Aurelius](#), [Seneca](#) and [Deepak Chopra](#)?

[Marcus Aurelius](#) (see Notes on [Meditations](#)) reminds us not to worry about the opinion of other people who don't even have a good opinion of themselves! He tells us: "The approval of such men, who do not even stand well in their own eyes, has no value for him."

And [Seneca](#) (see Notes on [Letters from a Stoic](#)) reminds us that the world is so inconsistent in its opinions we should just be done with it. He says: "Away with the world's opinion of you, it's

*"Write this agreement on paper, and put it on your refrigerator to remind you all the time: Don't take anything personally."*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

*"When you transform your whole dream, magic just happens in your life. What you need comes to you easily because spirit moves freely through you. This is the mastery of intent, the mastery of spirit, the mastery of love, the mastery of gratitude, and the mastery of life. This is the goal of the Toltec. This is the path to personal freedom."*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

always unsettled and divided."

While [Ervin Seale](#) (see Notes on [Take Off from Within](#)) reminds us: "There is one recurring, persistent, perennial, and dogging personal problem which, more than any other, steals the force and peace of people and ruins projects and enterprises and careers. It is the habit of feeling hurt because of what others do or do not do and what they say or do not say."

[Deepak Chopra](#) (see Notes on [The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire](#)) has a mantra I've said thousands of times:

*I'm totally independent of the good or bad opinion of others.*

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*I'm totally independent of the good or bad opinion of others.*

Why is this such a big deal?

Because, as [Don Miguel Ruiz](#) says: "Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves."

Let's think about it. Imagine interacting with the same person in two different situations.

First: the person had an AWESOME day—they got a great night of sleep, won the lottery and every other thing that could've possibly gone well for them unfolded. They're feelin' great. How do you think they're gonna treat us? Probably pretty well, eh?

Now, same person. This time, they got a really bad night of sleep, lost their job, got in a car accident, didn't eat all day long and every other annoying thing that could've happened, happened. Not in such a good mood. How do you think they're gonna treat us now? Prolly no where near as well as when they're rested, happy and all that jazz, eh?

The important thing to note here is that WE were exactly the same in both situations. But if we base our opinion of ourselves on how someone else treats us, we're in trouble.

Again, as Ruiz says: "Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves."

### 3RD AGREEMENT: DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

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

Well, there ya go!

The third agreement: Don't make assumptions.

Are you making any assumptions about what someone's thinking or doing? Can you see how the drama factor can go down \*dramatically\* (pun intended) if we just have the courage to ask what's up?

As [Ruiz](#) says: "The way to keep yourself from making assumptions is to ask questions. Make sure the communication is clear. If you don't understand, ask. Have the courage to ask questions until you are as clear as you can be."

So... Let's identify where we're making some assumptions and have the courage to ask 'em what's up and get out of the drama of assumption-ville, shall we?!? :)

## 4TH AGREEMENT: ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST

“There is just one more agreement, but it’s the one that allows the other three to become deeply ingrained habits. The fourth agreement is about the action of the first three: Always do your best.”

[Ruiz](#) continues: “Under any circumstance, always do your best, no more and no less. But keep in mind that your best is never going to be the same from one moment to the next. Everything is alive and changing all the time, so your best will sometimes be high quality, and other times it will not be as good.”

Sweet.

We need to always do our best if we want to bring the other three agreements alive.

And, of course, sometimes we’ll be \*totally\* on and our best will be rock star rockin’ and other times we might be a little tired and our best won’t be quite as stellar. It’s all good.

Let’s take a look at some other Big Ideas related to doing our best—from the Greek ideal of *Areté* (pronounced “are-uh-tay”) to Tony Robbins’ “CANI!” to the Japanese concept of Kaizen.

We’ll start with *Areté*. It’s one of my favorite words and ideals. In fact, the site I had before PhilosophersNotes (and Zadz) was called “thinkAreté.” :)

As I’ve mentioned in other Notes, in classic Greece, peeps like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle said that if we want to live with happiness we need to live with *Areté*—a word that translates as “excellence” or “virtue” but has a deeper meaning, something closer to “striving to do your best moment to moment to moment.”

*“Nobody abuses us more than we abuse ourselves.”*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

Think about it. When what you’re doing is less than what you’re capable of doing—and I’m not talking about what you “should” be doing here, but what your Highest Self \*knows\* you’re capable of—there’s a gap. And, in that gap is where depression and anxiety and disillusionment hang out.

When we close that gap by doing our best, there’s no room for the angst/negative schtuff/etc. and we feel REALLY good. Yah?

Again, our best will vary but let’s thinkAreté! :)

Tony Robbins has an awesome concept he calls “CANI!”—Constant and Never Ending Improvement. When we show up committed to doing our best and practice CANI!, we’re on an incredible upward trend where our best keeps on getting better.

(And last time I checked, that’s a good thing. :)

And, finally, you heard of “kaizen”? [Marci Shimoff](#) describes it this way in her great book *Happy for No Reason* (see Notes): “To make the quickest progress, you don’t have to take huge leaps. You just have to take baby steps—and keep on taking them. In Japan, they call this approach *kaizen*, which literally translates as ‘continual improvement.’ Using *kaizen*, great and lasting success is achieved through small, consistent steps. It turns out that slow and steady is the best way to overcome your resistance to change.”

## THE FIRST STEP TOWARD FREEDOM

“The first step toward personal freedom is awareness. We need to be aware that we are not free in order to be free. We need to be aware of what the problem is in order to solve the problem.”

I love that.

How can you change something you don’t know needs changing?

*"If you want to live a life of joy and fulfillment, you have to find the courage to break those agreements that are fear-based and claim your personal power."*

~ Don Miguel Ruiz

As [Seneca](#) says (see Notes on [Letters from a Stoic](#)): "The worse a person is the less he feels it."

And [Vernon Howard](#) (see Notes on [The Power of Your Supermind](#)) tells us: "Encourage yourself by remembering that any detection of negativity within you is a positive act, not a negative one. Awareness of your weakness and confusion makes you strong because conscious awareness is the bright light that destroys the darkness of negativity. Honest self-observation dissolves pains and pressures that formerly did their dreadful work in the darkness of unawareness. This is so important that I urge you to memorize and reflect upon the following summary: Detection of inner negativity is not a negative act, but a courageously positive act that makes you a new person."

So, let's bring some awareness to our quest for personal freedom.

These are the Top 5 things I \*know\* need some work from me:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

(Well done. :)

## WE STOP OURSELVES

"Who stops us from being free? We blame the government, we blame the weather, we blame our parents, we blame religion, we blame God. Who really stops us from being free? We stop ourselves."

Reminds me of [Joseph Campbell](#) (see Notes on [The Power of Myth](#)): "Freud tells us to blame our parents for all the shortcomings of our life, Marx tells us to blame the upper class of our society. But the only one to blame is oneself."

Let's get out of our own way and rock it, shall we?

## BREAKING DOMESTICATION STEP-BY-STEP

"There are many strong beliefs in the mind that can make this process look hopeless. This is why you need to go step-by-step and be patient with yourself because this is a slow process. The way you are living now is the result of many years of domestication. You cannot expect to break the domestication in one day."

Patience.

I've heard it's a virtue! :)

I don't know about you, but I often want things to change kinda quickly.

Realizing that all things (especially great things!) tend to take time, I've been blissfully developing my patience.

Here are a couple of my favorite thoughts on the matter:

[Epictetus](#) (see Notes on [The Enchiridion](#)) teaches us: "No great thing is created suddenly, any more than a bunch of grapes or a fig. If you tell me that you desire a fig, I answer you that there must be time. Let it first blossom, then bear fruit, then ripen."

And James Arthur Ray (see Notes on *Harmonic Wealth*) reminds us: “Everything has a gestation period, a time period that must pass before things will come into form. If you plant a carrot seed, it takes about seven weeks for the sprout to make its above-dirt entrance. Bamboo, which can grow up to thirteen feet in as little as one week, takes up to seven years to break through the surface of the ground. But for seven long years it looks like absolutely nothing’s happening. Now that takes some commitment.”

How about *you*? Feeling a little impatient about your growth?

Let’s chillax and just take it step-by-step and enjoy the journey! :)

## REPETITION MAKES THE MASTER

“All of these old agreements which rule our dream of life are the result of repeating them over and over again. Therefore, to adopt the Four Agreements, you need to put repetition into action. Practicing the new agreements in your life is how your best becomes better. Repetition makes the master.”

Repetition, repetition, repetition. It’s the stuff of Mastery.

As Aristotle tells us: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Let’s remember to practice these new agreements again and again and again and watch our best get better and better and better!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

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you’ll probably like...

[The Wheel of Time](#)

[Letters from a Stoic](#)

[Meditations](#)

[Tony Robbins](#)

[Paulo Coelho](#)

## About the Author of “The Four Agreements”

DON MIGUEL RUIZ



Don Miguel Ruiz was born into a family of healers and raised in rural Mexico by a curandera (healer) mother and nagual (shaman) grandfather. The family anticipated don Miguel would embrace their centuries old legacy of healing and teaching and as a nagual, carry forward the esoteric Toltec knowledge. Instead, distracted by modern life, don Miguel chose to attend medical school and later teach and practice as a surgeon. Don Miguel began teaching in the United States, with his mother, the Curandera, Sarita in 1987 and over the following years distilled the wisdom that became *The Four Agreements*. (Adapted from his site where you can learn more about Don Miguel Ruiz and his son Don Jose Ruiz: **MiguelRuiz.com!**)

## About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).