

Inspirational Books Column for MyFamilyCaregiver.com

Written By Melissa Pilgrim

Overall Column Introduction...

Wouldn't it be great if there was a crystal ball you could peer into each morning, letting you know just what to be prepared for throughout the day? Anyone could use the help of knowing that, but when someone is caring for another daily (or depending on someone else's care themselves), getting any kind of help, advice, or direction to prepare for the "always unpredictable" can be appreciated. That is why each month we will feature an inspirational book here that will help encourage and inspire you in your caregiving journey. Happy Reading!

Book 1: The Four Agreements, A Toltec Wisdom Book

By Don Miguel Ruiz

1. **Be Impeccable With Your Word**
2. **Don't Take Anything Personally**
3. **Don't Make Assumptions**
4. **Always Do Your Best**

These are the four agreements explained in this wise little book of Toltec knowledge, and using them daily as you either care for or receive care from another can help make the whole experience better for everyone. It can also be a sort of "handbook" for both parties, for if each person involved knows (and lives) by these guidelines it can help avoid confusion, hurt feelings, or misunderstandings.

"Toltec" was the name of a society in Mexico made up of scientists and artists who came together thousands of years ago to explore and conserve the spiritual knowledge and practices of the ancient ones. Though it is not a religion, Toltec knowledge honors all the spiritual masters and sacred traditions found throughout the world. It is a way of life and following these four main principals of it explained by author Don Miguel Ruiz, a nagual (master) from the Eagle Knight lineage of this society, can help lead to a happier (which is also a healthier) life.

There are many wonderful insights and examples of each agreement in the book and it is hard to summarize them completely. But here is a glimpse of some of this knowledge:

Be Impeccable With Your Word: Your words are powerful and like magic, for with them you can create things, both good and bad. Words can be hurtful, or they can inspire, help, and heal. So always be mindful of the words you speak to anyone.

Don't Take Anything Personally: What people say is normally about them, not you, so don't take what they say to heart (whether it is good or bad). This is especially true when someone is ill, for they are normally not themselves when they are (or could even act different from the medications they are on) and they can sometimes be unkind. Also, you can only take something someone says about you personally *if you agree with whatever was said*. If you do not believe it, it will not bother you. So learn to question what and why someone says anything to you before you decide it is true, or not.

Don't Make Assumptions: People make assumptions about what others feel, think, or do all the time. Assumptions such as these causes a lot of hurt and unhappiness in the world, for assumptions are things we “believe” are the truth, but are they *really*? The only way to know for sure (if you are truly not) is to ask questions. So have the courage to ask questions—lots of them, if necessary—and make sure the communication between you and the other person is clear so you can find out the truth without just assuming you already know. Once you feel the answer is the truth the assumptions about the matter will go away, and you will feel better with this truth instead of just an “assumption” about what *you decided was the truth* without really knowing for sure.

Always Do Your Best: At all times and in all circumstances strive to do your best, no more and no less than that. But also understand that your “best” is going to change moment to moment based on the circumstance, the time of day (or night), how you feel, and how tired you are at that given point. Give yourself a break when you know you are not at your “highest quality best,” yet you know you are doing the *very best you can at that moment* anyway. Remember that your best will ebb and flow and will also greatly depend on your emotional state, so keep striving to stay happy as much as possible too.

They seem quite simple, but in reality each of these four agreements can take time and practice to learn how to achieve. The book explains that this is often because it is hard for people to break old agreements, patterns, and beliefs they've had with others (or even themselves), for a whole lifetime (or even longer). But the book also shows how with mindful attention to these four basic, powerful life principles anyone can learn to do them, thus creating more love and happiness in their life.

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