

Introduction

“You’ve got a new book to write now!” said Toltec spiritual teacher Don Miguel Ruiz, his steady gaze meeting mine. It was September 1999. We were sitting in the lounge of Villa Teotihuacan, one of five lovely Villas Arqueológicas small hotels adjoining Mayan and Aztec ruins in Mexico. The unique atmosphere of this ancient setting only served to add to the surreal quality of our conversation.

At the time, I didn’t quite know what to make of this sweeping, unexpected pronouncement from Don Miguel, a spiritual teacher who interested me greatly but whom I had met for the first time just four days ago at the start of a workshop. It’s true that those four days had been filled with life-changing events, and we had shared powerful experiences. Even so, as we met for one last time, the last thing I expected was for Don Miguel to make such a sweeping statement about my future. But, then, I had come to expect the unexpected with Don Miguel.

First, a little background.

I am a longtime Swiss author and translator. At the time of my meeting Don Miguel, I was also the editorial director of a Franco-Swiss publishing house, based in Geneva, Switzerland. It so happened that, while I was in Mexico, the original French version of my latest book—*Modern Medicine: The New World Religion: How Be-*

liefs Secretly Influence Medical Dogma and Practices, as it is called in the English-language edition—was just coming off the press in France. Ten years had elapsed since I had last published a book, so I was rather proud and happy to have this new one coming out, and I gladly shared this thrilling news with Don Miguel while we were both enjoying a drink. Needless to say, my next book was about the farthest thing from my mind at that moment.

Picture, then, my reaction when Don Miguel dismissed all of my most recent accomplishments in one swift and enigmatic declaration: “That’s already the *past*. You’ve got a new book to write, now!”

A long, strange route had brought me to Mexico that day, where I was just one of several French-speaking participants at a Toltec workshop led by Don Miguel and his long-term apprentice Maud Séjournant. A French native, Maud was a long-time resident of Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was in Santa Fe that she had met Don Miguel just as he was starting to share his Toltec teachings, and had worked closely with him for a number of years.

At the time of the Mexican trip, I had known Maud for eight years. We initially met in 1991 when I was chief editor for a magazine on spirituality based in Toulouse, France, and hired her to write some articles about Native American wisdom and shamanism. Seven years later, I was working as editorial director for a publishing house in Geneva, Switzerland, when we began discussing a new collaboration. I asked Maud to oversee the publication of a series of English-language books about spirituality, entitled “The Circle of Life,” based on the title of her own best-selling French book. My role would be to translate the new series into French and publish the books in Europe.

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In the summer of 1998, Maud and I met in the lovely Voirons Mountains near Geneva to discuss which would be the first titles we would publish in the new series. Among the pile of American books she brought with her was a small tome based on Mexican Toltec spiritual teachings that attracted me immediately: *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*. It was written by an author largely unknown at that time—Don Miguel Ruiz.

The Four Agreements is an extraordinary book. Writing in very simple, modern, and clear language throughout the book, Don Miguel manages to synthesize for Western readers the essence of the Toltec wisdom that has been part of his family's spiritual heritage for generations. The main teaching tool is the use of four simple agreements, which offer a powerful way of working with the thinking patterns and behaviors that keep us unhappy and miserable: "Be impeccable with your word," "Don't take anything personally," "Don't make assumptions," and "Always do your best." These simple yet powerful agreements, if used regularly, are an effective way of creating freedom from fear and access to genuine love—so powerful, in fact, that this small book eventually became a publishing phenomenon and a worldwide bestseller.

I spent the whole night reading the book and became full of enthusiasm for its clear and true message. I was particularly drawn to its practical approach to daily life. Moreover, even though the book's sales were still modest in the United States, its sales potential in Europe was immediately obvious to me. The very next day, I contacted the American agent of the publisher, Amber-Allen Publishing, and requested the French rights. I didn't waste a moment getting started on the translation on my return to Geneva. The book had been published just a couple of months before my trip to Mexico.

I often say I don't publish books; I publish *authors*. I like to meet the people behind the printed page. That's especially true in the fields of self-help, spirituality, New Age, and shamanism. These are areas that interest me greatly. For me, it is of the utmost importance that authors I publish "walk their talk," as Native Americans say, and I often make a point of checking out an author's work by attending their workshops. Shortly before meeting Don Miguel Ruiz, I trained with Marshall Rosenberg, founder of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). Likewise back in 1983, I trained in North Carolina with Robert Monroe, author of *Out of Body Experiences*. I did the same with various well-known European authors.

After reading *The Four Agreements*, it wasn't out of character for me at all to feel a strong desire to meet the man behind these fascinating teachings. I wanted to experience for myself the truth of his message and the energy of love that permeates his writing. When Maud called to tell me she was organizing a special two-week French-speaking Toltec workshop with Don Miguel in Mexico and New Mexico, I immediately signed up. The plan was that we would train with Don Miguel at Teotihuacan the first week, then decamp to New Mexico for additional training with Maud and another longtime Toltec apprentice of Don Miguel, Brandt Morgan. When I found out that the first day of the workshop coincided with my 38th birthday, I took it as a sign that I should make this journey both to Mexico and within myself. It's funny, isn't it, how we often find "signs" that confirm the very choices we are already set on making?

So it was that I found myself in Mexico in 1999, for a two-week trip that would have a far-reaching impact on my whole life—an impact I couldn't possibly have foreseen.

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During the five days I spent with Don Miguel in Mexico, I went through one of the most extraordinary experiences of my whole life. Since then, I have used the unique teaching I received from him again and again. The seed for the book you hold in your hands was sown then and there and has quietly taken root over the years. Now, a decade later, after the American publication of two of my other books, it feels finally as though the time is ripe for this book.

The teaching on the Gift of Forgiveness that Don Miguel gave me and other workshop participants in Mexico and encouraged me to share with others has not been included in any of his other books. But it has had such a major impact on my life that I believe it would be a shame if it were known only to those of us who were there that week. Teachings such as this are meant to be passed on. I have often informally shared with others the principles of what I learned that week. By writing this book, I hope to offer the world what Don Miguel so generously offered me, and also to thank him from the bottom of my heart for this invaluable gift.

May you find the inner peace and love that this Gift of Forgiveness brings forth.

Olivier Clerc, September 2009