

The Good Life

Toltec Wisdom Tells Us We Are All the Artists of Our Own Lives

By Becca Hensley

Don Miguel Ruiz awakens me when he tells me what Toltec means. It's an Aha! moment that forces my eyes wide open. "Toltec" he says, "means artist. So, in our culture, rather than saying I am human, we describe ourselves, all of us, as artists." He goes on to explain that all of us are the artists of our own lives, the creators of our dreams, the instigators of our heaven on earth. I love this man – he makes sense to me.

Ruiz, the best-selling author of *The Four Agreements* and *The Mastery of Love*, admits that his ideas aren't new. They've been around for thousands of years. The difference he says is that at last humanity is ready for them. Skeptical, even cynical, I've just pulled the television plug after viewing the disgusting films of tortured Iraqi prisoners, and I'm feeling despondent and hopeless. He senses my doubts and reassures me, insisting the world is getting better, not worse as I have just come to believe. "Humanity is ready for transformation."

I so need to hear this. I want to believe in the goodness of people. In my heart, I know we are better than I think we are at this moment. I frown, willing myself to cast some light on the apparent unsavory state of the world. I remember for a second why I love to travel (I find that people are kind everywhere.) and why I love children (they effuse positivism), and I listen to him.

Having taught the tenets of his books for many years, Ruiz is quite secure, beyond optimism, even confident. "Very soon all the world will have a little heaven in their mind – and things will improve, no doubt." I begin to visualize it, little lights going on all across the globe. I feel better. Ruiz cites technology as an aid in our global awareness. His books, after all, have been translated into thirty-six languages and are read worldwide. He supports bringing up our children to experience the truth in their lives, so that they might teach others. Creating this chain, he asserts, will make a difference; the truth, he tells me, is in our hearts. We must just stop to find it.

He should know; Ruiz is from a long line of Toltec *curanderas* (healers) and *naguales* (keepers of the spiritual tradition) and has prepared his children to share their philosophies, as parents did before him. His grandfather told him life was a dream, and that when people realize that dreams can change each of our paths, then we will understand that all of humanity, too, can transform itself and bring itself to goodness. Toltec culture and philosophy draw strongly from the world of dreams. According to it, we dream when awake, as well as when we slumber. Perhaps our wakeful dream makes the most impact because we carry it with us throughout our lives. The daydream is the story we create about ourselves. It is the truth we tell about ourselves, but we must be certain to perceive it with clarity. It's our story and we're responsible for it. As artists, our story is our masterpiece – and our masterpiece is our life.

The problem, though, is our misperception. As babies, we come into the world fully comprehending love, our natural state. Instinctually, we love freely. But, domestication, as Ruiz calls it, conflicts us. We misjudge and misperceive everything. Our distortions affect not only our lives, but also the world around us. In *The Four Agreements*, Ruiz explains how we abuse ourselves by seeking perfection, by judging ourselves, by releasing negative emotions like rage and jealousy into the environment. Ruiz says that the world's conflict is not about good vs. evil, rather what we struggle with is truth vs. lies. What Ruiz calls lies I call baggage; the stuff that detains us, blinds us, and holds us back. This baggage comes from experiences, the viewpoints of others, our society. To cast off the baggage, we seek awareness. As seekers we want to know who we are; we want liberation and joy.

I ask Ruiz, "Why do we choose to live in lies?" "People are so afraid of the truth; we will do anything to avoid it," he answers. I ask, "Even when it makes us happy?" "Because we are lies and we cannot face truth, we think we will not survive," Ruiz explains patiently. Yet when we embrace truth by seeking meaning, by identifying our authentic life, everything becomes easier. Ruiz calls it liberation and transformation – and it begins immediately.

I love the simplicity of *The Four Agreements*, which shows us how to cast off our old ways - or agreements - and to adapt four connected ways of being: Be impeccable with your word; don't take anything personally; don't make assumptions; and do your best. These life rules resonate with individual messages, that when applied to our dreams begin to alter our negativity. A light goes on and we own our lives.

I read somewhere about Ruiz's conversation with an apprentice who was disturbed about her love life. He told her that people are either bees or flies and asked, "Which are you?" He pointed out that bees flock to honey and flies to excrement. So, he said, if you want to attract bees, use honey. When you send out excrement, you will get flies. Ruiz helps us to take command, to know who we are, to define our experience. We are honey and we deserve the sweet meat of life.