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## Wisdom Shared

Four Agreements That Could Change Your Life

BY RONDA BRESNICK HAUSS, LCSW

**W**e make agreements all the time as a society - for example, we agree to a common calendar, common monetary units, and certain laws that we have decided to live by. These agreements shape our behavior and our perceptions of right and wrong. Some agreements might be generally harmless - for example that no building in Washington, D.C. can be higher than the U.S. Capitol. Other agreements have caused us great pain - for example slavery or the agreement we once had of "separate but equal" education for black and white children. The danger is that sometimes we forget that we are the ones that made these agreements and simply see them as the truth.

In the book, "The Four Agreements" by Don Miguel Ruiz, the author outlines agreements that, if adopted and consciously lived by, give us the possibility of having greater personal power. These agreements appear to be quite straight forward and perhaps even simplistic - but they have the possibility, when honored, of transforming life.

### The First Agreement: Be Impeccable with Your Word.

Words have a great deal of power - they create reality and depending on how they are used, they can be freeing or be dangerous. Consider Martin Luther King's words,

*"Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true."*

This agreement is about using words in the direction of truth and love. It is about having the integrity to stop gossiping about others and to change the way that you speak to yourself. It is about saying what you mean and speaking with integrity.

### The Second Agreement: Don't Take Anything Personally.

This means that what ever happens around you - don't take it personally. Nothing other people do is because of you. People are living in their own minds -- and what they say is a reflection of their own experience -- not yours. If someone says -- "you look fat" don't take it personally, because this person is dealing with their own feelings, beliefs and opinions and how they see the world. Even if someone tells you that you are wonderful -- they are not saying that because of you either. When you stop caring about what others think about you, their words and behaviors no longer affect you and you no longer suffer. Trust that you know who you are, then you won't need to place your trust in what others do or say. You will only need to trust yourself to make responsible choices.

*"Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." Ralph Waldo Emerson*

### The Third Agreement: Don't Make Assumptions.

The problem with making assumptions is that we often believe they are the truth. We make assumptions all the time about what others are doing or thinking and relate to that as if it were true. For example, we often assume that our partners know what we think and that we don't have to say what we want. We also make the assumption that everyone sees life the way that we do. We assume others think the way we think, feel the way we feel and judge the way we judge.

The way to keep from making assumptions is to ask questions. Communicate in a way that avoids misunderstandings, sadness and drama. Find the courage to speak up and asking for what you want.

*"Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything*

simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it." *The Buddha*

**The Fourth Agreement:  
Always Do Your Best.**

Do your best under all circumstances - nothing more or less. Your best may be different at different times and may change over time. If you always do your best, there is no way you can judge yourself. When you do not judge yourself then you do not have to suffer with guilt, blame and self punishment.

When you do your best, don't expect that you will always be impeccable with your word, or that you will never take things personally, or that you will never make assumptions. Just do your best.

*"When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another."* Helen Keller

Ronda Bresnick Hauss is a licensed clinical social worker and the founder of the Quiet Waters Center for Trauma, Stress and Resilience, on Capitol Hill. She uses an integrative & holistic approach to psychotherapy - addressing the connection between the mind, body and spirit through the use of traditional talk therapy, meditation, visualization, and creative, non-verbal techniques. She can be reached at: 202-544-5050 and is on the web at: [HYPERLINK "http://www.quietwaterscenter.com"](http://www.quietwaterscenter.com) [www.quietwaterscenter.com](http://www.quietwaterscenter.com). ★

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