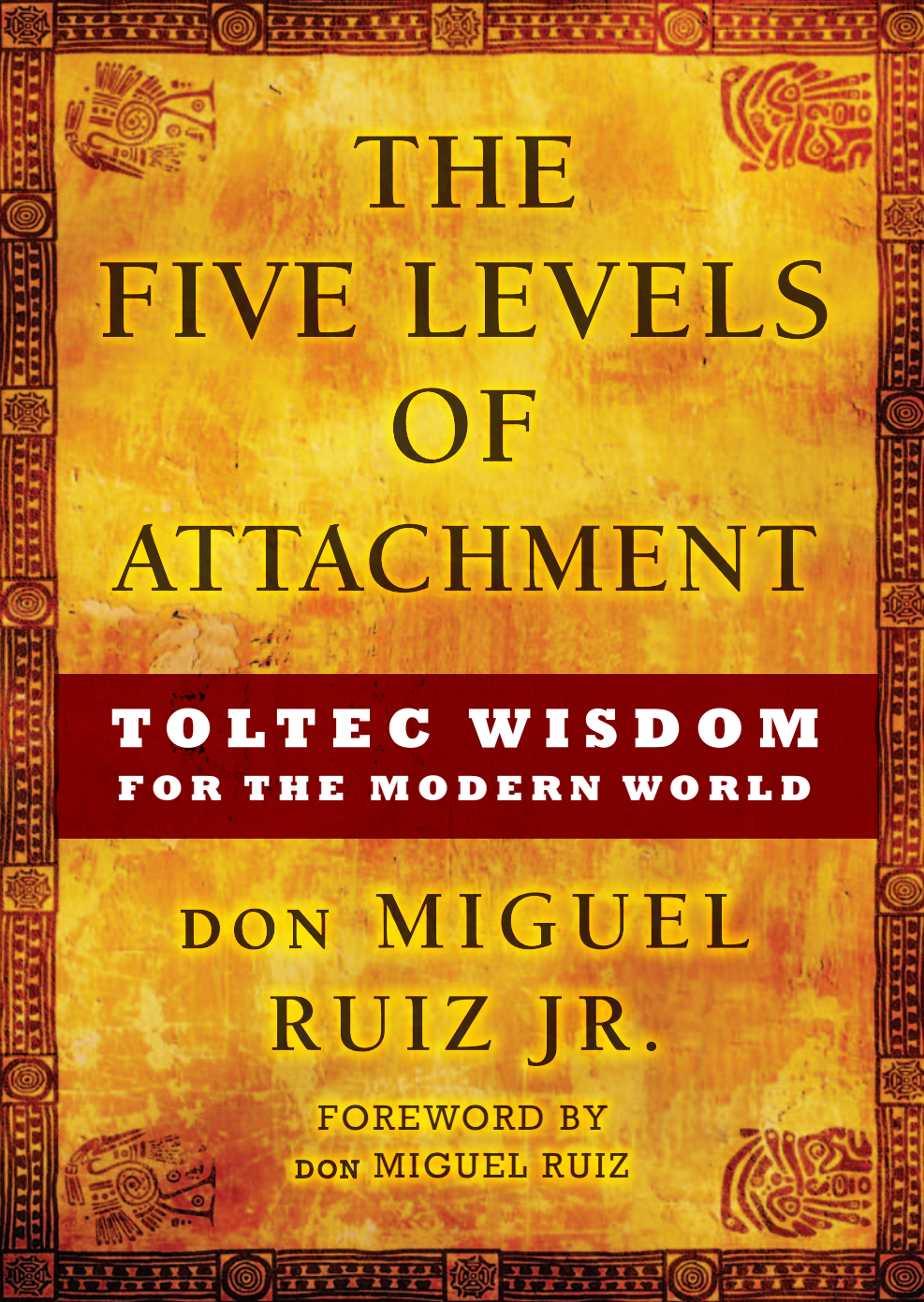




THE FIVE LEVELS OF ATTACHMENT

**TOLTEC WISDOM
FOR THE MODERN WORLD**

DON MIGUEL
RUIZ JR.

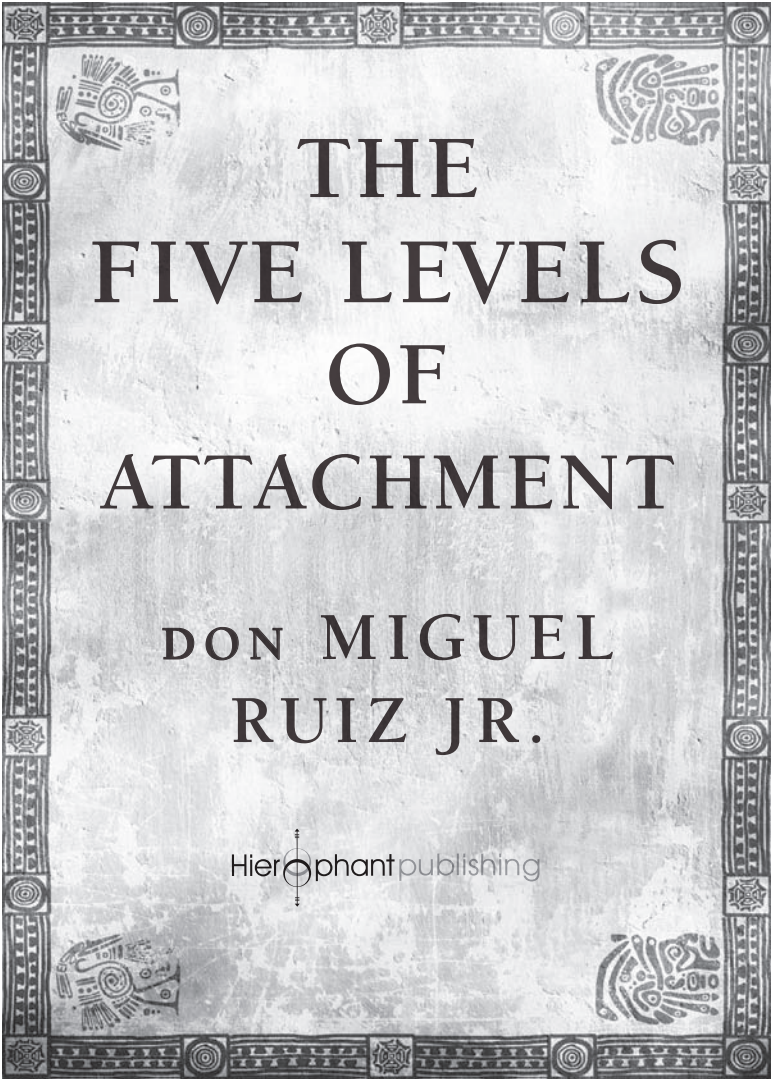
FOREWORD BY
DON MIGUEL RUIZ



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DON MIGUEL
RUIZ JR.

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Dedication

To all whom I love

Among individuals, as among nations,
respect for the rights of others is peace.

—BENITO JUAREZ

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Foreword

Don Miguel Ruiz Jr., my first son, belongs to a new generation of artists, Toltecs, who are transforming the way of life of our beloved humanity.

My son has spent a great portion of his life silently rebelling against the way other people live, creating many judgments and opinions. He did not realize that in doing so, he was becoming attached to those judgments and opinions, and his emotional reactions were becoming increasingly intense.

One day he had a conversation with his grandmother—a conversation that would forever change his life. During this conversation, his grandmother, a faith healer, helped him understand the attachment she had to the rituals she used for healing her patients. My son saw his own reflection in this interaction with his grandmother and was able

to clearly see all of his attachments. This is how his rebellion came to an end.

Although it took him a couple of years to completely assimilate this experience into his life, he finally decided to share it in a book. *The Five Levels of Attachment* is that book, and it is destined to transform the lives of millions of readers. It is written in a way that is simple, congruent, and easy to understand.

This book will help you gain awareness of how your attachments have created your reality, and how your belief system has been making all the decisions in the story of your life. It will also help you see how you create your identity based on the opinions and judgments of others around you. Don Miguel Ruiz Jr. explains how our beliefs become intimately connected to our identity, or who we think we are. This belief of what the truth is in turn creates all our attachments and all our emotional responses.

He also explains how our attachment to our beliefs distorts our perceptions, allowing us to readjust our perceptions until they conform to the rest of our belief system. This awareness helps us to easily understand how we create our own superstitions and might become fanatics of our own attachments.

He helps us realize that although we live in the present, our attachment makes us dream of a past that no longer exists, a past that is full of regret and drama. Our attachments also take us to an uncertain future full of fears that do not yet exist, making us feel unsafe.

By explaining how our attachments can be divided into five levels of intensity, he teaches us how to assess our own attachment to any particular belief that we have, and points out that the majority of the world's population lives within levels three and four, Identity and Internalization.

As you will see, don Miguel Jr. clearly states the influence attachment has over the decisions we make when designing the story of our life, and how these attachments move us away from reality. He also offers very effective tools that will help us improve the way we handle our levels of attachment and our resulting emotional reactions. This improvement will be reflected in the interactions we have with those around us, especially our loved ones.

This book is definitely destined to become a classic—one you will surely be reading again and again.

—DON MIGUEL RUIZ

Introduction

Everything is made of light. We are the stars; and the stars are us. When we see this, all of our senses are truly open and there is no need to interpret the world. In this moment, our full, unlimited potential is available to us. There is nothing blocking our way. . . .

—DON MIGUEL RUIZ, *THE FOUR AGREEMENTS*

My father, don Miguel Ruiz, a teacher and retired medical doctor, spent many thoughtful and transformative years interpreting our Toltec traditions to fit the world we live in today. The Toltecs were great women and men of knowledge who lived thousands of years ago in the area that is now known as south central Mexico. In the

Nahuatl language, *Toltec* means “artist,” and according to our teachings, the canvas for our art is life itself. I learned about the Toltec way of life through the oral traditions of my family, who (according to my paternal great-great-grandfather, don Exiquio) are direct descendants of the Toltecs of the Eagle Knight lineage. This knowledge came to me by way of my grandmother, Madre Sarita.

We call ourselves Toltecs not just because of our lineage, but because we are artists. Life is the canvas of our art, and the work of our tradition is to teach the life lessons that will help us create our masterpiece.

The Toltec tradition is not a religion, but rather a way of life in which our great masterpiece is living in happiness and love. It embraces spirit while honoring the great many masters of all of the world’s traditions. The whole point of all this work is to be happy, to enjoy life, and to enjoy the relationships with the people we love the most, starting with oneself.

I began my apprenticeship into my family’s tradition in San Diego, California, when I was fourteen years old. My seventy-nine-year-old grandmother, Madre Sarita, was my teacher and the spiritual head of our family. She was a *curandera*, a faith healer who helped people in her small temple in Barrio Logan, a neighborhood in San Diego,

with the power of her faith in God and love. Since my father was a medical doctor, the juxtaposition of the two forms of healing allowed me to see our tradition through different points of view.

I appreciated the power of my grandmother's words long before I had a firm grasp of their meaning. I also saw things that others could only describe as "magic" transformed into everyday happenings; miraculous healings were the norm for Madre Sarita. I still felt a strong pull from the outside world, though—the allure of hanging out with my friends, of being like everyone else. I moved back and forth between the Toltec world of my family and the mainstream world of school and friends, constantly struggling to find a way to combine my experiences and yet keep them separate at the same time.

Though she spoke no English, my grandmother gave sermons and lectures across the country. My apprenticeship began with translating my grandmother's lectures from Spanish to English. For many years, I awkwardly stumbled over her words, and my grandmother would just look at me and laugh.

One day she asked me if I knew why I stumbled. I had all sorts of answers: you are speaking too quickly, you don't give me a chance to catch up, some words don't have

a direct translation. . . . She just looked at me silently for a few moments and then asked, “Are you using knowledge, or is knowledge using you?”

I looked at her blankly. She continued, “When you translate, you try to express my words through what you already know, what you think is true. You do not hear me; you hear yourself. Imagine doing the same thing every single moment in life. If you are looking through life and translating it as it goes along, you will miss out on living it. But if you learn to *listen* to life, you will always be able to express the words as they come. Your knowledge has to become a tool you will use to guide you through life but that can also be put aside. Do not let knowledge translate everything you experience.”

I nodded in response, but it didn't dawn on me until many years later what my grandmother was truly talking about. Throughout life, we constantly narrate, or commentate on, everything we do, say, see, touch, smell, taste, and hear. As natural storytellers, we continuously keep the plot moving forward, sometimes missing millions of subplots that are developing on their own. It is like taking a sip of wine and saying, “It's a bit dry; it has definitely aged well, but I can taste the bark. I've had better.” Instead of simply experiencing the joy and flavors of the wine, we are

analyzing the flavor, trying to break it down and fit it into a context and language we already know. In doing this, we miss out on much of the actual experience.

This is a simple example of how we narrate life—explaining it, but, more importantly, justifying and judging it. Instead of taking an experience for what it is, we create a story to make it fit our beliefs. During Madre Sarita's talks, I had to completely shut down my thoughts, because if my mind's commentary got in the way I would miss out on her message. With this simple process, my grandmother showed me that if we only see the world through the filters of our preconceptions, we are going to miss out on actually living. After much practice, I eventually learned to close my eyes, shut out the world that existed outside my head, and translate *every single word* she said accurately.

Seeing beyond our filters—our accumulated knowledge and beliefs—does not always come naturally. We have spent years growing attached to them in various degrees, and they feel safe. Whatever we become attached to can begin to shape our future experiences and limit our perception of what exists outside our vocabulary. Like blinders on a horse, our attached beliefs limit our vision, and this in turn limits our perceived direction

in life. The stronger our level of attachment, the less we can see.

Think about your set of attached beliefs as a unique melody repeating itself in your mind. In a way, we are constantly trying to force our melody—the one we have become accustomed to hearing—onto other melodies, without realizing that often the melody is not our own, and perhaps it's not even the one we want to be playing. If we continue playing only what we know, never opening ourselves to listen to the other songs flowing around us, we are letting our attachment to our particular melody control us. Instead, choose to listen to other melodies playing. Perhaps you will contribute to them, adding a harmony or a bass line and just seeing where the music takes you. By letting go of your attachment to what you think the melody *should* be, you open yourself to the potential to create a unique and beautiful song of your own composition or a collaboration that can be shared with others.



In this book, I will teach you the Five Levels of Attachment. They are guideposts for gauging how attached you are to

your own point of view, as well as how open you are to other opinions and possibilities. As the level of attachment increases, one's identity, the "who I am," becomes more directly linked with knowledge, or the "what I know."

Knowledge and the information we perceive are distorted and corrupted by our narrators—the voices of our thoughts that debate the rightness or wrongness of every action we take and every thought we have. When we believe in something so strongly that we lose the awareness of our Authentic Self within the stories and comments of our internal narrators, we are allowing our preconceptions to make our decisions for us. Therefore, it is important to be aware of where we are on the scale of attachment with any particular belief. With awareness, we can regain the power to make our own decisions.

It is my hope that you will engage this book to measure how attached you are to various beliefs and ideas in your life that create your reality, your Personal Dream, and contribute to our collective reality and the Dream of the Planet. Only with this deeper awareness of yourself are you truly free to pursue your passion and experience your full potential. The choice is up to you!



CHAPTER I

An Exploration of Perception and Potential

Our point of view creates our reality. When we are stuck in our beliefs, our reality becomes rigid, stagnant, and oppressive. We become bound to our attachments because we have lost our ability to recognize that we have a choice to be free of them.

When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we often hear a narrative in our mind of what we see, a definition of self in the form of an identity that is based on our “agreements”—the thoughts and beliefs we have said yes to. This identity stems from ideological beliefs that have come to us over a period of time from our family, culture, religion, education, friends, and beyond, and these beliefs

are encapsulated into a single system that is represented in the reflected image of a physical living being—in my case, a living being named Miguel Ruiz Jr., with a point of view that is uniquely my own.

Each one of my agreements represents an attachment I have created for myself over the course of my lifetime. For example, when I look into the mirror, I perceive myself in this way:

I am . . .

- Miguel
- a Toltec
- a *nagual* (a spiritual guide)
- a Mexican-American
- an American
- a mestizo
- a husband
- a father
- a writer

and so on . . .

This list of self-definitions is my reflection, and when I really look at myself, I can hear the narration of my agree-

ments and the conditions that have become my model for self-acceptance. My thoughts are the narrators of my attachments, my belief system.

I project onto the image of myself the values and attributes that reflect my beliefs. The more attached I am to my beliefs, the more difficult it becomes to see myself for who I am at this moment, and the less freedom I have to see life from a fresh perspective and perhaps choose a different path. As my attachments become more intense and more entrenched, I lose the awareness of my Authentic Self as it becomes obscured by the filters of my belief system. In the Toltec tradition, we call this the *Smokey Mirror*—the smoke that doesn't allow us to perceive our Authentic Self.

What gives these attachments their strength is *conditional* love. When you look in the mirror, instead of accepting yourself for who you are at this very moment, you likely start telling yourself why you are unacceptable in your current form, and what you need to do to be able to accept yourself: *I must meet this expectation to be worthy of my own love.*

The desire to obtain the flawless fulfillment of the archetypal model of each one of my agreements distorts my reflection even more. I begin to judge and evaluate

myself according to the standards of my agreements, which have turned into the conditions for self-acceptance. I implement a system of reward and punishment to train myself to reach that archetypal model; this is known in the Toltec tradition as *domestication*.

The primary tool used to domesticate oneself is self-judgment. Using my archetypal model of what “I am Miguel” is supposed to mean, I see upon looking at my reflection all the perceived flaws or inadequacies, and my domestication springs into action:

- “I’m not smart enough.”
- “I’m not attractive enough.”
- “I don’t have enough.”
- “I’m lacking this or that.”

and so on.

Self-judgment resides where self-acceptance wishes to be. Our attachment to these negative beliefs and self-judgments can become so normal that we don’t even recognize them as condemnations anymore; we accept them as a part of who we are. But at a very basic level, our self-judgments are all consequences of what we believe about ourselves at our core—whether we accept or reject ourselves.

Of all the beliefs to detach from, this is the most important one: *Let go of the attachment that you must obtain some image of perfection in order to be happy.* And this isn't only about appearances; it includes the way we think, the philosophy we follow, our spiritual pursuits, and our place in society. All these things are conditions upon which we accept ourselves. We think that in order to be worthy of our own love we must live up to the expectations we place on ourselves—but we need to realize that these expectations are the expression of our agreements, not of our true nature.

Ironically, it is often at the moment that we have the opportunity to see our truth—when we are faced with our reflection, whether in a mirror or outside in the world—that the narrators speak the loudest. I know of people, myself included, who have refused to look at themselves in the mirror because the self-judgments were deafening. It is impossible for people—teens and adults alike—to live up to an illusion.

Of course, it's easy to blame our media, our culture, or our community for perpetuating images of what is expected of us. We are flooded with commercials and archetypal images of heroes and heroines, beautiful damsels in distress and professional athletes, examples of ugliness and how *not*

to be. But at the very core of it, there is no one to blame, because a commercial, like self-judgment, has no power over us unless we agree with its message. It is only when we willingly attach ourselves to these images and distortions that our happiness is compromised.

We do not need to take the blame for these self-judgments. We can simply become aware that they have been developing in our lives since childhood through the process of domestication. Once we are aware of our self-judgments, we can reclaim our freedom by choosing for ourselves to transcend the rewards and punishment model that has been imposed upon us to eventually arrive at a place of self-acceptance.

We have a choice. . . . That is our power.

When you look into the mirror, you are the only one who can hear your narrators; only you know what those self-judgments are. They take whatever voice and shape you give them, but they are only the expression of something you've already said yes to. You can make the choice to detach yourself from the standards that create an unrealistic image of yourself by knowing that you have the power to say no. When you no longer believe in a self-judgment, it will no longer have any power over you. You can choose to view yourself from a place of acceptance

based on the undeniable truth that you are already perfect and complete exactly the way you are right now.

From this point of view, you may still choose to make some life changes; but now the motivation to change is not because you hope to someday love yourself but because you *already do* love yourself. When the reflection is viewed from this angle, change flows in synchronicity with the trajectory of your life, and the possibilities are limitless. Suffering only occurs when we forget that.

Mistaking Perfection for Imperfection

When my father first tried to get me to understand that I am perfect, I found it impossible to accept. I tried to understand, but I couldn't. I was attached to my belief that perfection is something to be attained through hard work and dedication—and I still had a long way to go. How could I be perfect? I hadn't yet accomplished my goals: I wasn't what I wanted to be. I couldn't attract the girl I wanted. I didn't weigh what I thought I should weigh. On and on I went with my diatribe, managing to ascertain and then judge all of my imperfections.

With this kind of perfection, whenever our story does

not match our beliefs, we judge it as imperfect; then we punish ourselves for not living up to our beliefs of how we think we should live. We eventually acquire a definition of perfection that has nothing to do with actual perfection: “being free from all flaws or defects.” Most often, we read this definition through the eyes of judgment, from the point of view of someone outside who’s trying to live up to the stories we’ve created about ourselves.

If we do happen to achieve perfection momentarily from this point of view, we reward ourselves with conditional self-love. Then we use conditional self-love as our motivator to pursue this distorted idea of perfection in the future. It’s a circuitous problem.

I continued to struggle with this concept as I grew older. Still, my father persisted throughout the years with this message. He told me, “Miguel, when you understand that you are perfect just the way you are, you will see that everything is perfect just the way it is.”

It’s not easy to just wake up one day and say you’re perfect and actually believe it. It requires desire and commitment. First, you leave behind any false ideals of perfection—you release your attachment to what you believe it means to be the perfect you. In order to learn this lesson, I needed to stop judging myself for not meeting my own

expectations and accept myself for who I am at this very moment. I began at the beginning, learning to love myself and giving gratitude every morning for being alive.

Second, you view life through the eyes of an artist and accept that everything is a work in progress, a never-ending masterpiece. Every brushstroke is perfect simply because it exists. As the paint hits the canvas, it grows and develops into what it is—even if we don't always have an outline to keep us in the lines. Whether colorful scribbles or a detailed landscape, each element of the piece is fulfilling and complete, even as we continue to paint, changing and evolving with every stroke of life. As my father says, “Our life is a canvas, and we are all Picassos.”

From an early age, it is engrained in almost every one of us that we must achieve certain ideals or become “somebody” in order to be worthy of our own acceptance, of our own love. Existing within this as-soon-as-I-have-this or once-I-do-that mentality chains us to the belief that we are not free to live our lives now.

Many of us are familiar with Miguel de Cervantes' great literary masterpiece *Don Quixote*. In it, retired gentleman Alonso Quijano moves to La Mancha and becomes so caught up in books of chivalry that his sense of reality becomes so distorted his identity transforms

into the character of don Quixote. He sees the world through filters of fantasy and adventure. Whatever reality presents, don Quixote redirects the story to fit his own expectations and beliefs. By the end, our hero is defeated and dejected, chasing after an image that forever eludes him.

Like don Quixote, we are constantly investing ourselves into the stories we want to believe. We create our own personas so that we are “somebody.” When I was young, I took on various identities. I was Miguel Ruiz Jr., the Goth. Then I became Miguel the Intellectual, then Miguel the Bohemian, then Miguel the Artist, and so on. I gave myself rules the same way don Quixote created his rules—through a distorted perception of who I was. Other people would see their own truth and wonder what I was doing. But all I saw was what I wanted to see. And like don Quixote’s faithful servant Sancho Panza, I heard my stories and knew I was being a little crazy, but I believed them just in case I was right.

I spent many years trying to live up to those images I created of myself before discovering that *this* is who I am—no story needed. It’s really me. I am perfect at this very moment, and that is all I need to enjoy my life. Once I learned this, I could change my life in any direction

I saw fit at any given moment. I now had the freedom to choose. The possibilities became endless, just as they always had been. I do not make changes in my life today because I feel I must change in order to accept and love myself; I make changes to express myself and experience more of life, because I already accept and love myself for who I am.

Flaws and defects originate from our own ideas and beliefs. In order to recognize perfection—or to see the world and ourselves *as is*—we become aware of our attachments to our ideas and beliefs and let go of them, even if only briefly, to see beyond them. I have always been perfect, and so have you. When we can't perceive this, it's because we are too busy judging everything for not being something other than what it is. The world and everything in it is perfect simply because it exists at this very moment, in the only manner it can possibly exist. The same is true for me and for you. And that is perfection: "I am because I am at this moment."

This is what freedom is: the ability to enjoy and be exactly who you are without suppressing yourself in the form of judgment. A bird is a bird. A saguaro is a saguaro. A human is a human. Miguel is Miguel. You are you. Perfect.

From that point of view, change is different. If we try to change without first accepting who we are, we risk creating more false images of ourselves. But if we accept ourselves for who we are at this very moment, we change because we want to grow and evolve with life; love is no longer the condition for change, it is the starting point for change. This is the true meaning of unconditional love.

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