

Lies vs. The Truth

A Toltec Perspective on Addiction and Recovery

A roundtable discussion with Don Miguel Ruiz

Editor's Note: Don Miguel Ruiz was born into a family of healers and raised in rural Mexico by a curandera (healer) mother and nagual (shaman) grandfather. The family anticipated Don Miguel would embrace their centuries-old legacy of healing and teaching and as a nagual, carry forward the esoteric Toltec knowledge. Instead, distracted by modern life, Don Miguel chose to attend medical school and later teach and practice as a surgeon. A near-death experience in a car accident one night in the late 1970's brought his wake-up call. "I saw that I existed separate from my body. So I asked myself, if I am not this body, what am I?" Don Miguel's survival allowed him the opportunity to begin an intensive practice of self-inquiry. He devoted himself to the mastery of the ancestral wisdom and, in 1987, began teaching in the United States.

On July 23, 2004, Don Miguel joined Lee McCormick and Gary Seidler to discuss the nature of addiction. Barbara Emrys, Stephanie Bureau, and Meghan McChesney, teachers in the Toltec lineage, also participated in the discussion. Born of the intention to introduce Counselor readers to the Toltec view on addictions, the interview explores topics including the addiction disease concept, the source of addictions, therapist education, "in recovery" versus "recovered" and the concepts of family, spirituality, faith, and love. Throughout the discussion, Don Miguel functions as a human mirror, reflecting back to us the nature of our thoughts about addiction.

Addiction as a disease:

Lies and the stories of our lives

Lee McCormick: Having been a medical doctor, you are familiar with the disease concept. What is your point of view regarding the addiction disease concept?

Don Miguel: We live in a society of humans who live with addictions. The main addiction is the addiction to suffer. For centuries and even thousands of years, humans believe that they came to this world to suffer. This belief is preached in different churches, all the different religions, many of the philosophies. I can tell you this is a big lie. It is not true. We make this lie true by believing it. We grow up in families, communities, cities, and countries that suffer. We learn that this is the way of being — to suffer.

The word Toltec means "artist." Every human in the world is an artist, which means every human is a Toltec. The art that we create is our own life. We are living life all of the time, regardless of the story that we create about our life. We learn to create our story the same way that the people around us create their own story. Your father and mother taught you to write your story. Your teachers, your friends, your brothers, everybody around you taught you what you believe you are.

The dream of society existed before you were born. Whatever is there was waiting for you ... to be mature enough to go inside your head, and then take place in you. We can say that knowledge is the first mental disease of humans — but not exactly knowledge, because knowledge is not good or bad, or right or wrong. The problem with knowledge is that it is contaminated ... by lies. You believe the lies that came from your father, your mother, your teacher, the priest, the press, the television, from everybody around you. It is like the whole world gets in 'cahoots' in order to imprint everything into your head.

Lee: Do the lies come in the form of opinions, or viewpoints?

Don Miguel: No, I mean just lies. What is the opposite of lies? The truth. Then truth is only one. But, there are billions of lies. That is how you grew up, to believe all the lies from everybody around you. All those lies have a voice, a voice that only you can hear ... and you call it "thinking."

A voice with only one thought will not be a problem, but there are thousands of thoughts and they take turns and they oppose each other. This is a state we call "Mitote" (chaos of the mind). You are creating the story of your life based on what you know. You know everything about yourself, and everything about the outside. At least that is what you believe. It doesn't mean that is the truth.

Lee: Then, we seek out people that will agree with us.

Don Miguel: We seek out people who will support your story, and you compare stories. You feel sorry for them and really you feel sorry for yourself. You just need to walk outside and you can see all the people are addicted. The addiction is to suffer.

The source of addictions

Don Miguel: Addiction begins with the first lie that you learn. The first lie is that you are not you. That is the very first lie, that you are not you.

Lee: What do you mean?

Don Miguel: You are a child and you go to school. The teacher is talking to all the children and she says, with a good intention, "You are here to learn. You need to learn because you want to be somebody. You don't want to be a nobody."

We agree with the teacher. If you have to work so hard to become somebody, then what are you now? That is the real message. They are telling you, without words, that you are nothing. You return home, and you hear Mom and Dad say, “You have to behave in this way in order to be good.”

Lee: Sometimes you are told you are not good. You’re just told, “You’re no good. You’re bad. What’s the matter with you?”

Don Miguel: That happens all the time, to everybody, and that results in a reaction. The reaction is that you pretend to be what you are not. You want to be good enough .. and that is when you learn to fake things.

Lee: So, the spoken messages are not nearly as powerful as the unspoken message that is connected to it.

Don Miguel: The messages become very loud. We grow up believing in the lie of our imperfection when we are perfect. That lie becomes the greatest excuse to all of humanity. As a professional, before you go and practice on all the people that need you, you need to focus your attention on yourself. That is very important. Instead of trying to be the therapist who will help them, first help yourself. Stop believing your own lies. Stop believing everybody else’s lies. The result of that will be incredible.

The nature of a therapist’s education

Lee: Most people in the mental health care business feel they have a very complex, complicated, evolved belief system. They’ve been through years of education.

Don Miguel: So many lies they believe. If you go to psychiatry school or psychology school, you will hear so many bizarre lies. Everywhere, lies exist. At a certain point, it is kind of frightening to give a title to someone who will help many people before they even treat themselves. But, there is no other way.

Lee: We’ve inherited this system.

Don Miguel: Yes. This is not right or wrong or good or bad. Everything can change ... through awareness. It is a whole mastery, just to be aware. Aware of what? Two things: all the lies and the truth.

The first mastery of the Toltecs, the artists, is the Mastery of Awareness. By mastering awareness, you see the transformation of everything around you. The Mastery of Transformation is second.

Lee: To begin with the Mastery of Awareness, you first have to focus on yourself.

Don Miguel: Exactly. You need what we call the “minimal chance,” which can come in two different ways. One way is from life itself, the other is from a master. What a master does is to just reflect you, so that you can see yourself just the way that you are, not the way you want to be, not the way that you pretend to be. That mirror will shift everything, if you decide to use it. Most people are so afraid that, although life puts the minimal chance in front of them again and again, in many different ways, they close themselves to it.

Lee: I’ve made a lot of choices that I found out later were not the truth. It seems that over time, it doesn’t take nearly as long for me to understand that what I’ve chosen is not what I want, and so I can come back and choose again. Does this example illustrate the development of awareness?

Don Miguel: Yes, the Mastery of Transformation as a result of awareness. You are aware. You make a choice that you may like or you may not like. If you decide you like it, then your whole dream goes in that direction. If you decide you don’t like it, the whole dream goes in a different direction. The whole universe works very simply. It is action-reaction, action-reaction, action-reaction. It works as “is — is not, is — is not, is — is not.” That shifts also, what “is not” can become what “is.” What “is.” can become “is not.” It is always changing.

Lee: The whole time the mind is always looking for an explanation ... to find out what is wrong.

Don Miguel: The mind has the need to understand. The mind has the need to know, even if what you know is not the truth.

Gary Seidler: So, the therapist has to do his or her own housecleaning in terms of personal awareness and conduct before they can be effective in helping others.

Don Miguel: This is the ideal. It is not exactly true, because it is not how the schools work or teach. The current model is that you go to school for a certain path, you go for certain credits and you get your license, your license to kill. It is OK, that is how everything is working.

Gary: Is it OK?

Don Miguel: It is not good or bad or right or wrong, it is just the way it is. It is perfect either way. As humans, we may not like the whole dream, and we can change it.

What is addiction?

Lee: The addictions, to me, are symptoms of our discomfort with life.

Don Miguel: Every addiction ... is a result of self-rejection. Self-rejection creates all the addictions.

Gary: Would you therefore call addiction a “human” disease?

Don Miguel: I would call lies a human disease. Lies are the virus that puts the human mind in that condition. Addictions would be symptoms.

Gary: An element of the addictions community believes that alcohol, for example, is a poison for some individuals. From the very first time that you imbibe that poison, there’s a physiological addiction that develops. How do you view that? Do you think it is possible that it is a genetic disease in part? A physiological disease in part?

Don Miguel: Everything is involved in the addiction, it is not just one thing, and it is everything together. At the core is that we believe in lies. By believing in lies, we reject ourselves. Let’s see the anatomy of any addiction. At any time in life, you believe the lie that you are not the way that you should be. That creates a self-judgment and that, of course, creates self-rejection.

There are a lot of reactions from that self-rejection. Over time, these reactions become automatic. It is just action-reaction, action-reaction, hundreds of different reactions that hit you at the same time and make you behave in a certain way. It doesn’t matter where you go, or who you are with, you will always be with yourself. That is something that people cannot avoid. But, they try to escape from themselves. Maybe some drugs (Don Miguel imitates smoking) will help. Maybe some food will help. We try to avoid all those automatic reactions and we try to escape. The more that we try to escape, the more guilt, and the more shame comes up in us. We hate ourselves even more than before, sometimes so much that we attempt to kill ourselves, to just get over all of it. We fail and we don’t die. Maybe we try to kill ourselves again or maybe it is time to look for help.

When you look for help, you are looking for the truth. Then there are people who tell you, “Well, you cannot do it by yourself, you need divine help.” “You need to trust in someone and that someone will rescue you, will save you.” “You need a savior.” You ask, “God, please help me!” That is a big step. God is here (Don Miguel points to his chest.) Or maybe God is here (Don Miguel points to Barbara.) “God, I am so sick.”

I don’t know if you remember back to the very beginning of Dreaming (the Dreaming classes Don Miguel started in 2000) when I let all of you know that you are predators, that you are the parasite. I asked each one of you to stand up and say, “I am a parasite and I am addicted to suffering.” I asked you to describe all the ways that you make yourself suffer — “I suffer because I drink too much.” “I suffer because I smoke too much.” “I suffer because I eat too much.” “I suffer” That was a big step in awareness. Now, you know. Then it becomes will versus all those lies.

The role of will

Don Miguel: Will is not something that you can measure by quantity or intensity. Will is the result of the application of the truth.

Lee: So when someone says, “I don’t have the willpower to not drink.” What you’re actually saying ...

Don Miguel: Then you are lying. I respond by saying, “You are lying.” But if you want to believe that lie, then drink for the rest of your life.

Lee: Where does will fit approximately in that relationship?

Don Miguel: First, you want to hear yourself. It is your desire, you are tired of the addiction, and you don’t want it any more — all the automatic reactions that become millions of reactions that control you, that keep you in that direction. You experience all the excuses and all that becomes automatic in your body, but you believe that you cannot control the addiction, which is another lie, of course.

First you have a desire to be saved, but real desire. I am not talking about saying, “Oh, I want to stop smoking,” as you pick up a cigarette and continue to smoke. That is lying. Compare that to the person who picks up a cigarette, looks at the cigarette and says, “It’s over. I don’t smoke anymore.” That is will. The will is not controlled by your intellect. It is not a desire in your head to try to stop doing something. That is not will. That is stupidity. Do you understand?

Gary: Then will requires one hundred percent commitment.

Don Miguel: Will just is. It is effortless. It is not exactly true that, if you get another drink and drink it, you are an alcoholic again. But sometimes it is good for people to believe that.

Gary: Because?

Don Miguel: Because there are so many other lies ... and this is a lie that will take away many of the lies until they really start to face the truth. Many times, the lie that addicts are incurable is good. I don't think that I would recommend that teachers stop using that when they see results already. I am not sure how long Alcoholics Anonymous has existed, but it works. If that lie keeps them in this little hell rather than this big hell, let's keep them in this little hell.

Gary: It's working, to a degree.

Lee: It is serving them.
"In recovery" versus "recovered"

Gary: In the addictions mental health field, the traditional thinking is that the recovery individual is "in recovery" and never "recovered." What do you feel about that?

Don Miguel: Well, I just had a car crash and my body is recovering. Two years ago I had a heart attack and the doctors say that my heart is still recovering. I don't believe it really. The way that my heart is, with the pain that I have, I am perfect.

Gary: So, you have recovered from your heart attack?

Don Miguel: I don't think so. I will always be recovering.

Gary: In recovery.

Don Miguel: Yes, using their words. But in my words there really is nothing to recover, but I am recovering. Knowledge gave me a mental disease and I was in recovery until the truth arrived and killed all those lies. I can say that now I am fully recovered, but is that really true? I really don't think so because something else in my body is happening. Something else in my mind can happen, and at any time I can have a stroke. They will put me in treatment and they will think that I am recovering, but recovering from what? Everything is perfect the way that it is.

Barbara Emrys: You can say that we are in "evolution."

Don Miguel: That is the better word. I will tell you something that a very, very smart psychiatrist told somebody else, but I witnessed it. As a favor to me, this psychiatrist came to see this recovering patient. The psychiatrist looked at the patient, who had attempted to kill himself, and the psychiatrist started laughing. Just that laughter provoked a response from the patient. He was angry. The psychiatrist asked the patient if he could ask some questions. The patient said, "Sure, go ahead." The psychiatrist asked, "Why do you drink?" The patient replied, "Well, ..." and started to give justifications. The psychiatrist said, "No, no, no. Let's forget all that. Why do you drink?" The patient again responded with justifications. The psychiatrist again said, "No. Why do you drink?" The patient finally got very upset and said, "Well, I don't know!" The psychiatrist said, "The answer is very simple. You drink because you are stupid. That is why you drink. Everything else is just an excuse. You drink because you are stupid. You drive when you are drunk because you are stupid. You use drugs because you are stupid." Of course, that brought out a big reaction, but it was the truth. You are doing all that just because you are stupid and that is the truth. That made a huge difference in that patient.

Lee: It stops the story.

Don Miguel: That stopped everything.

Gary: Is the answer the same for an addiction to work, to gambling?

Don Miguel: The answer is the same for everything. The same thing, you are stupid. Someone tells you, "I just lost ten thousand dollars." You respond, "Why did you lose ten thousand dollars?" They answer, "Well, because I put a chip on the red block." No, it is because you were stupid. Why do you suffer in life? Because you are stupid.

Lee: You just don't know.

Don Miguel: What is it that you don't know? Use your awareness. Why don't you know? Because you are stupid. It is not that the

information is not there, you can see it. There is no excuse. You go look in any direction and truth will wait for you there. Use any lie and truth will be waiting there. Then you could say, "OK, I don't want to be stupid anymore." Good choice! If you stop your stupidity, the only one who benefits is you, nobody else. You stop stupidity for yourself, not to please anybody else. If you want to die of stupidity, be my guest. Is that a good cure or not?

Barbara: My thought is that you seem to be giving people a chance to take this out of the perspective of "I am a victim." As long as you are a victim to this crime of addiction, you don't have a chance. If you know yourself as perpetrator, you have a chance. Why am I committing this crime? It's mind, parasite against body. The body is the victim. You take your point of view out of victimhood. The mind, the personality, the director of this human body is not the victim, it is the perpetrator. The perpetrator says, "I am not going to do it anymore." That is will. As long as we see ourselves as the victim of a crime, circumstance, childhood, or disease, then we will just run with victimhood for the rest of our lives. That is why people continue to feel that something is missing. "I am still a victim I am not drinking anymore, but I am still a victim." Don Miguel: The first step is to accept that you are the parasite. You are the one who is beating up your body. Your body is your victim, your favorite victim. The body can accept an incredible amount of various addictions.

Lee: We've built a culture around it.

Barbara: We've built a species.
Addiction is a 'sin' against ourselves

Gary: What is spirituality?

Don Miguel: Life.

Gary: That's it?

Don Miguel: Life.

Gary: What do you see as your role?

Don Miguel: To love, to keep loving and loving and loving and loving, creating whatever comes into my head, and resting.

Gary: Could you expound on "create," "love," and "rest" and how they need to work together to help someone come out of misery?

Don Miguel: Well, I am completely out of misery even if my body is in pain. I am my own nature. I am an artist. I was born to be an artist and I will die being an artist. This means that I am creating all the time. In what way you want me to explain these words?

Gary: Rest is not just sleeping. What is real rest?

Don Miguel: You can reach rest when you find inner peace. This means that when your head stops talking, then you are resting. You can continue to talk even while you are sleeping, when you are dreaming. That is not exactly rest. But when that voice leaves you alone, it is incredibly peaceful.

Gary: Yoga and meditation are obvious means to get there.

Don Miguel: All that can take you there. It doesn't mean that it will take you there, because we do learn how to fake things. You can watch someone sitting cross-legged in a yoga position but you have no idea what is going on in that mind. Are they really resting? They could just be pretending to be a very good yogi.

Gary: So, you are there when you experience peace of mind, essentially.

Don Miguel: Yes, the point is to stop the inner dialogue. That is real peace. Just being yourself, when you love yourself so much, you cannot help that you love everything. That gives you so many ideas for creation ... your lifestyle is your creation, and you can shift it in any direction that you want to. There are no rules. You can dream a glass of wine with your dinner, or not, maybe you'll have just water. You can do whatever doesn't go against yourself.

Lee: What do you mean by "doesn't go against you?"

Don Miguel: This applies to the concept of sin, which has nothing to do with religion. You are sinning when you go against yourself, when you do things that will hurt you, or you believe things that will hurt you. The first rule is never go against yourself, which means, be impeccable. Never join forces with anyone who will go against you and never create situations that go against you. These

rules will take you to impeccability, without sin. Of course, we can say that to people who have addictions, because they see all that they did against themselves, how they join forces with people around them, against themselves, and how they create circumstances that really go against themselves.

Must we leave our loved ones behind?

Gary: In the addictions field, learning from the family of origin is a critical step on the road to recovery. Sometimes our parents and grandparents are not able to walk with us or go along with our new awareness and understanding. Must we leave these people behind? Don Miguel: Well, yes and no. When you face the truth and you no longer believe those lies, you can understand the people around you very easily, but they will not understand you. You let go of the interaction that you used to have with your family and you replace it with a new one. You will not try to convince your family at all. You need to learn to respect your family and to love them just the way they are. It doesn't mean that you have to go away and never see them again. No. This is another big lie. No, you need to make peace, first with yourself and then with them.

Gary: You don't necessarily need to convince them.

Don Miguel: No, no, don't even try to convince them, just make peace. If you try, you will become someone that they don't want to see. Someone that is not welcome to them.

Gary: Is forgiveness always necessary?

Don Miguel: Always and that begins with yourself. You need to forgive yourself first and then you have to forgive everybody else, regardless of what they may have done to you or not done to you. You forgive them, not because they deserve to be forgiven. You forgive them because you don't want to have the same emotions every time you remember them or see them. Forgiveness is really an amazing act of self-love. Faith and the courage to love

Lee: How does faith fit into this discussion?

Don Miguel: Faith is believing something one hundred percent, without a doubt. Most people invest their faith in believing lies.

Lee: Yes, but you have to believe something.

Don Miguel: That is a huge lie. You don't have to believe anything and what's more, I encourage you not to believe anything. Don't believe yourself. Don't believe anybody else. What is true will survive. What is not true will dissolve. All those millions of lies cannot survive the presence of the truth.

Lee: Living in this world, you won't have much companionship in agreeing with your point of view.

Don Miguel: Do you think I care?

Lee: No. The people who are out there seeking help, trying to deal with their addiction to suffering — they don't know how to not seek companionship, regardless of whether that companionship is in hell or not.

Don Miguel: I respect that completely. I have complete respect for all of them. Their choices will not affect me at all. First of all, everything begins right here (Don Miguel points to his chest.) All my love begins right here and it comes out of here. I cannot really love you, if I do not love myself. I cannot really respect you if I don't respect myself. I cannot really have gratitude for you if I do not have gratitude for myself. Everything begins right here, within.

Don Miguel Ruiz is the author of *The Four Agreements* (1997), a *New York Times* best-seller, *The Mastery of Love* (1999), *The Four Agreements Companion Book* (2000), *Prayers* (2001), and *The Voice of Knowledge* (2004) all published by Amber-Allen Publishing in San Rafael, California.

Barbara Emrys has studied with Don Miguel for 10 years and is currently conducting *Dreaming workshops* in San Diego and Las Vegas. These workshops are what they consider to be the highest teaching toward self-awareness.

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