



Dreams and Assumptions

Ancient Toltec Wisdom Helps Build Love and Integrity

Indigenous wisdom is not especially indigenous, it's just wisdom.

Lincoln Stoller, PhD, 2022. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)
www.mindstrengthbalance.com



“My family, we're indigenous people from San Luis Potosi in Central Mexico. My father moved to Detroit and brought all of us because the automobile companies were paying great wages.”

— **Sixto Rodriguez**, singer & songwriter

I wonder what people's problems are and I wonder what people think helps them, because, in many cases, it doesn't. We can see what attracts people by the products they're buying.

I've written a few books and I solicit Amazon reader reviews. I've spent money to pitch my books to reader's clubs, such as NetGalley and Goodreads, and I've gotten a few dozen great reviews. These independent reviews are important.

There is criticism of vendors paying people—or robots—to issue positive ratings for their products. It's hard to tell if a review is real because reviewers don't need to have purchased the product. In my case, many of my reviews have come from readers to whom I've given my books.

Four Principles

Don Miguel Ruiz's 1997, 140-page book, *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom (A Toltec Wisdom Book)* has 83,000 positive reader reviews on Amazon.com, which serves the 300 million people in the US, and 79,000 positive reader reviews on Amazon.ca, which serves the 30 million people in Canada. The book ranks #1 in the category of Mental Health, #1 in New Age & Spirituality, and #2 in Success Self-Help.

What are the four directives of the ancient Toltec culture that so many people are finding life-transformative?

Number 1: Be impeccable with your word.

Number 2: Don't take anything personally.

Number 3: Don't make assumptions.

Number 4: Always do your best.



What People Think

Social trends are built from people's beliefs. When we learn what people think, we are better able to understand social trends. But there are levels to a person's beliefs, and what's on the surface is often not reflected underneath.

One has to wonder whether the 162,000 overwhelmingly positive reviews for *The Four Agreements* were made by real people. But even if they weren't, the high sales ranking shows people are buying it.

Seen as a test of cultural consciousness, Ruiz's book seems to tell us that these four ideas, whether they're honored or violated, play a large role in how people think. It strikes me as obvious that if people were adhering to these principles, they wouldn't find them to be such revelations. These principles tell us what people consider to be their biggest failures.

As you must have noticed, people support what they already agree with, and the attitudes they agree with most emphatically are often the ones they are having difficulty resolving. The reason people can be so emphatic on certain issues is because they're taking a stand in central conflicts in their lives.

Two Personalities

Each of us has many personalities, but seen from the position of our culture, there are two that dominate: the personality that governs our personal feelings and the personality that governs our social behavior. Considering *The Four Agreements*, each can be seen either as a personal imperative or a social prescription.

Our culture insists that we interpret these agreements one way, and it is our personal inclination to interpret them another. It is the conflict between these two interpretations that causes us suffering. And this suffering is because of punishment for misbehavior, or conflicts within ourselves.

I'm generalizing. I'm inferring the cultural centrality of these issues based on the popularity of Ruiz's book. In this piece, I want to look at principle number three: don't make assumptions. I'll consider the other principles in another post.



Assumptions

Judging by the number of user reviews, I suspect Ruiz is a little hypocritical. He would like us to assume his book will be useful to us based on its inflated popularity and, based on that assumption, we should buy it.

Excusing that minor point—assuming it is a minor point—we make assumptions all the time. We could not make decisions if we didn't make assumptions. All the things we see and think and feel are based on assumptions. Ruiz says:

“All the sadness and drama in your life was rooted in making assumptions and taking things personally... In any kind of relationship, we can make the assumption that others know what we think, and we don't have to say what we want. They are going to do what we want because they know us so well. If they don't do what we want, what we assume they should do, we feel hurt and think, ‘How could you do that? You should know.’ Again, we make the assumption that the other person knows what we want. A whole drama is created because we make this assumption and then put more assumptions on top of it.”

Assumptions are an attempt at understanding. Mistakes occur because we take actions based on flawed understanding, but that does not mean the solution is not to understand.

Heartbreak

Heartbreak is caused by vulnerability of one person and aggression by another. Sometimes both people are vulnerable and aggressive, and this could be between sweethearts, siblings, spouses, or parents and their children. In these cases of close association, the assumptions made are the essence of the relationship. To avoid assumptions is to avoid engagement, vulnerability, and the attempt at understanding.

Ruiz cautions us against assumptions of a personal sort. He cautions us against making assumptions about what other people think as the basis of their motivations. We're prone to mistake what other people think because of the conflicts between social presentations and personal feelings. People usually act in order to create an effect and not to communicate their feelings.

Personal rapport is built on assumptions, and the basic assumption is always the same. It is the assumption that you understand. Ruiz advises a combination of not trying to understand and not believing what we think. But it's only by building understanding, finding deeper truth in assumptions, that meaningful relationships are built.

The social assumptions we're expected to make satisfy different needs from our personal assumptions. Because assumptions are both necessary and inaccurate, they create conflict. And because it's never clear where to draw the line, we're always struggling with them. But this is good because the struggle is the learning process. What is bad is being punished for it.

Socially, we're aiming for security and advantage while personally, we're aiming for meaning and purpose. When we presume another person's inner thoughts based on their socially oriented actions, we're almost certainly wrong. But making and testing assumptions is how we learn, and it need not be injurious. It is personal disrespect and violence that more often cause harm, not the attempt to understand. Curiosity does not kill the cautious cat.



Questions

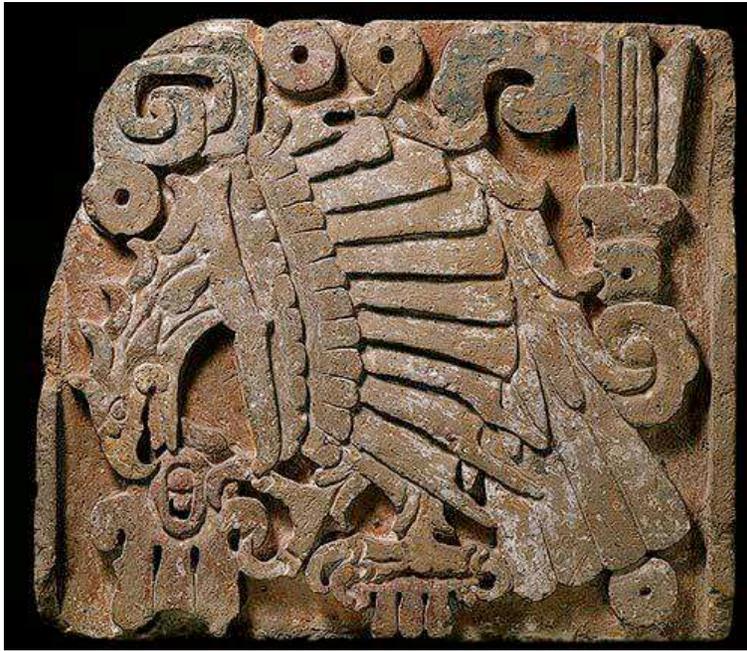
I question Ruiz's advice. All of our personal interactions are based on presumption because we can never know the details of another person's world. We hardly know the details of our own! Learning the truth is a process of disappointment only when our needs are denied, and we have needs. Needs for support, understanding, companionship, trust, connection, and contact. To advise avoiding assumption boils down to disengaging from one's needs. Yes, this will avoid sorrow, but it is a coping strategy, not a strategy for long-term survival.

Intimacy is based on presumption, and it is a presumption that we refine. Understanding is a presumption and without understanding, or some attempt at understanding, no form of guidance would be possible. The problem is not presumption, it's our faith in our presumptions and our insistence that they cannot change. As long as our presumptions can grow, verify, and adapt, they form the basis of learning and the foundation for understanding.

Ruiz advises more than just questioning our assumptions, he advises that we have none. In a shopworn phrase, he says, "Real love is accepting other people the way they are without trying to change them." But since that kind of "real love" is not satisfying, he adds,

"It is much easier to find someone who is already the way you want him or her to be, instead of trying to change that person. Also, that person must love you just the way you are, so he or she doesn't have to change you at all."

I have never seen such a case, and those I've known who have built enduring, loving relationships never assumed this kind of static perfection. These people were full of assumptions, and they worked at understanding and aligning with each other. Love is built on the dynamic exchange of attention, energy, and involvement. It is a juggling act that requires being able to catch all the balls that the other person throws in the air, and the more balls in the air, the deeper the engagement.



The Way of the Toltec

Ruiz consoles us with this image:

“Just imagine the day that you stop making assumptions with your partner and eventually with everyone else in your life. Your way of communicating will change completely, and your relationships will no longer suffer from conflicts created by mistaken assumptions... This is the mastery of intent, the mastery of the spirit, the mastery of love, the mastery of gratitude, and the mastery of life. This is the goal of the Toltec.”

I entirely agree with him. These days will come, and they will be consonant and peaceful because the time when we make no assumptions and engage in no conflict is when we are dead. However, he’s incorrect regarding the goal of the Toltec.

I am also a Toltec master, a master of the ancient wisdom, and the goal of the Toltec is not intellectual and emotional anesthesia and disengagement. The goal of the Toltec is engagement, authority, responsibility, and commitment. To embrace one’s assumptions, apply, test, and correct them. Demand engagement, authority, responsibility, and commitment from others.

It’s only when others fail that we should learn to disengage because they have nothing to teach us. Make no investment in manipulated assumptions when on the path to personal freedom. Such is the way of the Toltec... and everyone else too.

“It is better to have less thunder in the mouth and more lightning in the hand.”

— **Apache Wisdom**

References

Ruiz, D. M. (1997). *The four agreements: A practical guide to personal freedom (A Toltec wisdom book)*, Amber-Allen Publishing.

To subscribe to this newsletter, click on [Newsletter-Subscribe](#).

