

## DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Week #3 of a 4-Week Series, "The Four Agreements"

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Well, welcome to Week #3 in our four-part series of "The Four Agreements" based on the book of the same name; don Miguel Ruiz is the author. Many of you have this book, yes? And some of you have even come up to tell me that you got it signed by him when he was here like 15, 20 years ago. Yes? All right. That's awesome! I love that.

So, we're in Week #3. And he says that, by putting these into practice, you'll find more inner peace and personal freedom. Have you been finding that yet? Because we're in Week #3 now, everybody. I've got some "so-sos." Some people are; okay. They're challenging, aren't they? I think that first one -- "Be impeccable with your word"; I think that one challenged me the most. This week might also be right up there with challenging me.

So here are the four agreements that we're exploring and practicing over these last weeks here. So, the first agreement: Be impeccable with your word. Primarily that means: be impeccable with the word towards yourself. How are you speaking about yourself? How are you thinking about yourself? Because that's also going to affect how you're thinking and speaking about other people. That's your thoughts. That's your texting. That's your social media. That's all the words. Be impeccable with all the words.

And then last week we had the second agreement: Don't take anything personally. Because when we take things personally, what we're doing is we're forgetting that any comment that's made by another person -- it's based on what's going on with them. It's based on their upbringing. It's based on their belief system. It's based on their internal state of being at that moment in time. And so, it's an invitation to us, as well; that if we do get stirred up by something -- we have a reaction to it; feel a little sting -- then that's an invitation to us for our own healing. And I'll add there our own forgiveness work, too, towards that person and or ourself.

Tonight we're talking about the third agreement: Don't make assumptions. And then next week we wrap it up with: Always do your best. And then I mentioned before there was a fifth agreement that was added later. And that really says to remain open and respectful to other people's ideas and perspectives. To keep your heart open when you're hearing other people's opinions.

And this book has -- the foundation of this work, the philosophy that we really are working off of -- is this definition. Or actually, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, they've got the definition up there for me next, but the foundation of the work is that we're manifestations of God, which is pure love and pure light. Therefore, we are pure love and pure light. That's the foundation we're working with. We're manifestations of God, which is pure love and pure light. Therefore, we are pure love and pure light. And so that's the truth -- the spiritual truth -- we're taking into this third agreement, don't make assumptions, tonight.

So, here's the definition. I wanted to make sure that we were all on the same page. So, here's the definition of assumption on your screen:

*"An assumption is a thing that is accepted as true, or as certain to happen, without proof."*

It's another way of saying: it's the stories we tell ourselves before we have all the information. And we do it all the time! There's a lot of little ways that we make assumptions. As I've really zeroed in on this -- focused on this the last few days -- I've noticed how many assumptions I've made during the day. Even up to today, when I had to yell out loud, "Don't make assumptions!" Speaking about it tonight; don't do it!

And it's like that, you know, don't take anything personally. We tend to take things personally often, but also we make assumptions often. And it's usually after the fact that we've made them. And it's the stories -- again, these stories we make up in our minds; the movies we start playing in our minds. And then we run with it. And it just makes us miserable. In both cases, it makes us miserable.

So, who has been or is married or in a long-term relationship? Okay; so you all know what making assumptions is all about, right? I always love it when you go to the restaurant. Everyone will stay anonymous on this story. But you go to a restaurant and the wife says, *"I'll take a salad. Can you order me a salad? I'm going to go to the restroom."*

The husband, when the waiter comes, orders the salad. She comes back, the salad comes, and she says, *"That's not the salad dressing I wanted."*

And he says, *"Well, that's the salad dressing you always get."*

*"Well, that's not what I wanted now."* [Congregants laugh]

They both made assumptions, right? She made assumptions he knew. He made assumptions he knew what she wanted. So, there was assumptions on both sides.

Same thing with our friends. We do the same thing with our friends. We may assume that their silence or distance means that they're angry with us or they're not interested in being our friend anymore. Or we assume that, because we're friends, we have the same preferences or the same opinions about things.

We also tend to assume that our partners, friends, even co-workers -- they just know how we're thinking; what we're thinking; what we want; how we're feeling. And we also assume that we know how they think and feel and what they want.

And I can tell you, after being together with my husband 31 years -- married 28 years -- we've had our own lessons in making assumptions. And mostly I've realized that he is not, in fact, a mind reader. [Congregants laugh] I thought that was in the description for husbands. Apparently it's not. [Congregants laugh]

Actor Henry Winkler ... Does everyone remember the Fonz? Okay; well, the Fonz has some really great wisdom here, everybody. The Fonz said, *"Assumptions are the termites of relationships."* That's a good one! Assumptions are the termites of relationships.

Again, the really interesting part is: when we make an assumption and we turn it into truth -- either out loud or in our heads or both -- and then we retell it as if it's truth. And really, that's another word for gossip. Right? Gossip is based on the story that you've told yourself about the person and situation, and then you keep telling it, again, as if it's true.

And it's from these assumptions -- these stories that we make up -- that misunderstandings occur. And we take it personally. And then we create with our words an entire drama.

So, can you see how we've broken three agreements in one? Right? We form an assumption. We take it personally. And then we use our words to create drama about it. Three broken agreements.

And I found this from science. Science says that a single emotion lasts about 90 seconds. Ninety seconds. But someone can give us a look or say something, or a conversation doesn't really sit well, and then we build a whole story around it. Now, the emotion around that passed within 90 seconds. But it's the story that keeps it alive. Our nervous system then responds to the story we tell ourselves over and over and over again. But not the actual event itself.

In other words, we suffer more from the story attached to the interaction than we do from the initial emotion. It's the story we keep telling ourselves that keeps us in suffering, not the initial emotion.

Here's what our author don Miguel Ruiz says here on your screen:

*"All the sadness and drama you have lived in your life was rooted in making assumptions and taking things personally."*

That's pretty powerful. And I was thinking it's really ... It's also a case of us using our spiritual attribute or ability of imagination against our own selves. You know, in Unity, we teach about the 12 spiritual powers or attributes. So, of our 12 spiritual attributes, imagination is how we visualize and create and manifest in our life. So, we can use imagination to create a garden with rainbows and unicorns ... or we can use our imagination to imagine a boogeyman under our bed.

Today, I had a whole zombie apocalypse happening. And me and my neighbors are going to be totally prepared, by the way. How are we going to use our imagination? Because we can cause our joy or we can cause our suffering.

Eckhart Tolle, the famous author of "Power of Now," just recently posted this. He said: *"Life isn't as serious as my mind makes it out to be."* The power of our imagination, our word, and the stories we tell ourselves.

So, when we aren't sure about what someone has done, or not done; said or not said; what if we respond with curiosity instead of judgment? What if we come to the other person with an open heart? Without a preconceived story? What if we come ready to understand the other person?

So Brené Brown, who I love; she tells this story. I've told it in classes, know; maybe on Wednesday nights. But she had an interaction with her own husband, and she started using this technique, which is: **"THE STORY I'M TELLING MYSELF ABOUT THIS IS ..."**

I will say, it has also saved my marriage. *"The story I'm telling myself about this is ..."* You know, there was a time that my husband, Juan, he'd come home later than I'd like. The kids were little; I wanted us all to eat dinner together. And so, I would start getting all worked up about this. Because then, the story I was telling myself, I started realizing, was that ... *"You know, Juan, the story I'm telling myself is that you're more dedicated to work than you are with the family."* Or, *"You'd rather be with your co-workers more than you'd like to be with us. That's the story I'm telling myself."*

Now, once you say it out loud, it kind of seems silly. But also, it gives him the chance to respond without feeling attacked. And it turns out -- when someone doesn't feel attacked, you're more likely to get an open-hearted response in return.

I had a chance to express my feelings calmly, clearly. And it also allowed me to learn more about my anxious attachment style. Right? I started learning about different attachment styles. We all have different attachment styles. And I started realizing a pattern. *"Well, the story I'm telling myself here is... Wait a minute, this is all about me having an anxious attachment style. Let me heal that."*

See, we use it as the invitation to healing.

And there's something there, too, and that's safety. And we touched upon it last week, as well. We want to feel emotionally safe. And the reasons that we make up assumptions -- the reason we start telling stories -- is to justify, explain, understand everything. Because our mind wants answers. So, if we don't have the answer, then our mind starts telling stories in order to get the answers.

And here's what Ruiz writes. He says, *"It is not important if the answer is correct. Just the answer itself makes us safe. This is why we make assumptions."*

It's not even that our answer has to be correct. It's just that we have an answer, and now our mind feels like it can relax. That's why we make the assumptions.

And he later adds: *"When we believe something, we assume we are right about it to the point that we will destroy relationships in order to defend our position."*

When we believe something, we assume we are right about it to the point that we will destroy relationships in order to defend our position. So, here's an opportunity to release the need to assume, and to embrace the peace of understanding.

I just read a daily Buddhist post that said, *"Peace isn't something you create. It's what's left when you let go."* Peace isn't something you create. It's what's left when you let go. Let go of the story. Let go of the assumption.

And he also writes quite a bit about how we make assumptions when it comes to our relationships, whether it's friendships or romantic relationships. But we make assumptions about what we need to be - - how we need to show up -- in order to be liked. So, we change ourselves in a relationship or in a friendship in order to be liked.

So, letting go includes what we assume are the assumptions that other people are having about us. Because often we feel like we have to act a certain way, dress a certain way, look a certain way, have a certain job, have a certain degree. And a lot of times it can sound like, *"Well, people will only like me if ..."* Or, *"They'll like me if I ..."* fill in the blank.

And it really just makes us shrink ourselves. It makes us betray ourselves.

*"Ultimately,"* Ruiz says, *"Real love is accepting other people the way they are without trying to change them. If we try to change them, this means we don't really like them."* Hmm. And so, I would say the same is true in reverse. If someone feels they have to change you, then they don't really love you just the way you are. So, it's a call to being true to yourself, which means honoring yourself and having healthy boundaries.

And so, this agreement is also about returning to and honoring who you really are, which is a unique expression of the intelligent, magical, mystical universe; that manifestation of God: pure love, pure light. It's about returning back to that foundation principle that all of these agreements are based on.

So, there's two steps that don Miguel Ruiz lays out for us to help us prevent making assumptions more often.

So, the first: **ASK QUESTIONS**. Ask questions. Communicate clearly. If you don't understand, ask again. If they seem not to understand, say it another way. Instead of getting impatient or angry, how else can I help them understand? But ask as many questions as you need to be as clear as possible.

And I just heard a great podcast from Tara Brock. She's a Buddhist teacher and psychologist. And she said: thinking about this person that maybe you're having a disagreement with or you're not understanding what's going on with their life, and just asking -- either personally or to your own self: What is your life like for you right now?

You know, maybe going up to a friend who maybe has been out of sorts. Or maybe they've gone through a big event: a layoff, a divorce, a death in their family. You know, what is life like for you right now? Just to extend that compassionate heart to another person and be committed to creating loving, kind connections through, again, clarity, compassion, truth ... including your own truth. Be true to who you are.

And then the second step is: to **HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD**. You get to have your voice heard. You can ask for what you want. Everyone has the right to have their voice heard and their request heard. And everyone has the right to have their reaction; have their feelings. But we, as adults, are not responsible for another person's reaction, as long as we're being impeccable with our word. And even then, everyone gets their own reaction.

So, sometimes we think -- I've heard people say -- *"Well, I didn't really want to go to the party. But I didn't really have anything else planned, so I felt like I should say 'Yes' and go to the party."*

But you can just say, *"No; thank you. I'm not going to go to the party."* You don't have to have anything else planned on that night. You can just say, *"No; thank you."* Go be in your jammies. Enjoy yourself. Honor yourself. You have the right to say *"No."* No is the complete sentence.

Or you can say *"Yes."* But do so because you want to. Not making assumptions that you think you're saying what the other person wants to hear. Say what you want to say.

So, asking as many questions as you need; giving your answers as many times as possible; communicating without emotional baggage or manipulation around it. Because when you don't make an assumption, it means your word becomes impeccable.

So, I worked with Rev. Sherri James -- I mentioned that before -- in California. And we were going through this book together when we were co-ministering. And she helped me learn that, when we make an assumption, what we do is we close off possibilities. Because we've created a story that limits the good that can come from the situation. We've created a story and limited Spirit -- the universe's creativity and abundance -- from flowing with ease.

So, here's from author John Seeley Brown. It's here on your screen. It says, *"The harder you fight to hold on to specific assumptions, the more likely there's gold in letting go of them."*

So, we can use our word. We can use that power of creation along with our imagination to manifest relationships -- all types of relationships -- that are fulfilling and healthy and caring. But we're going to stop creating a story in our head before we have all the facts or all the information and, instead, use our words and our thoughts for good. Don't take anything personally in order to not jump to making an assumption. And, again, we're making up these stories and assumptions to try to keep ourselves safe.

So, what do we do to keep ourselves safe and emotionally regulated? Clear communication; honest communication. Interrupt the rumination. The rumination is the result of the assumption.

So as soon as you start hearing yourself making up a story -- creating a story -- say to yourself, *"I'm starting to tell myself a story!"* Or, *"The story I'm telling myself about this is ..."* Take a moment to pause, to breathe, to come back into your body. Movement -- whether that's walking or dancing in your house or shaking or whatever you got to do! But it changes the energy. It stops the storytelling. And then being mindful with our words: being impeccable with our words. So, we don't feel the need to explain what we don't yet have the answers to. It's okay not to have all the answers. And then we heal those parts of us that get charged.

And another big part of this too is to -- it helps to make connections with other people who are committed to their spiritual and emotional growth. So, look around; that's everyone here, right? When we come together in community and we're all together growing spiritually/emotionally -- we're interested in that; we're invested in that. It helps build a community and a support system that keeps us feeling emotionally safe. So instead of making assumptions, we can be here now. Taking care of ourselves now. Honoring ourselves now.

Another great actor, Alan Alda; here's what he said. It's on your screen: *“Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are the windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while or the light won't come in.”*

So, this week, as we practice the third agreement -- Don't make assumptions -- we let the light in by remembering that peace begins when we stop trying to read minds; when we stop predicting motives; when we stop writing stories without all the facts. Because assumptions cause suffering.

So, choose peace. So starting now, we're going to choose curiosity over conclusions; compassion over judgment; honest communication over fear. Because curiosity allows for connection. Clarity creates emotional safety -- and it's that emotional safety that we're all longing for. And then we're going to use our imaginations for love: to create oneness instead of fear and separation.

Because what we experience when we release assumptions is that we've created space for understanding, healing, authentic connection. And it's in that space that Spirit – the Divine -- has room to move and create the highest and best experiences for our lives.

That's what we're working on this week, my friends. That concludes our third week in the series, “The Four Agreements.” Blessings, everyone!

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