

On Agreements and Pictures
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Ideas from two self-help books I read a few months ago have proved useful to me as rules to live by, guides to living, however best to put it. The books: Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements* (Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997); and William Glasser, *Taking Charge of Your Life* (iUniverse, 2011). I'll briefly sketch out the ideas here and recommend that you read the entire books, which I obtained in Kindle form from Amazon. Basically, what's here are my takes on the Ruiz agreements, which are agreements one makes with him- or herself regarding how to proceed in life. I added an argument Glasser made in his book to the last agreement, which fleshes it out. Take into account that I selected and altered what was in the books to get to, call it, my truth. So this is some of Ruiz and Glasser and some of me. I refer to myself in all of this, but I hope readers will find these ideas applicable to their own lives.

As I read over what I wrote after having completed this writing, it struck me that I come across as being more on top of things with these agreements than I actually am, that I'm clear and certain about them and personally locked into them and reaping their benefits and that all is well. If only that were the case. These commitments make sense to me and have been helpful to me to the extent that I have been willing and able to stick with them, but I go in and out with them, and I have the gnawing feeling that I'm missing the point or incomplete in my thinking about them, and that I'm personally incapable of pulling these agreements off in my less-than-encouraging circumstance, and that at my advanced age, over seventy, I simply don't care enough about doing any of this, and that it doesn't matter anymore whether I do it, or something like that, I'm not altogether clear. Probably the most accurate thing that can be said about these next paragraphs is that they might provide useful food for thought and encourage people to look into the Ruiz and Glasser books to see what's there.

With this disclaimer on the record, here are five agreements (I made a separate agreement out of an aspect of one of the four Ruiz proposed) I've made with myself, or anyway think I have:

1. To Be More Impeccable with My Words

I'll take very, very seriously what I say, and what I do about what I say. I'll *speak the truth*, or, better, my truth, the truth as I discern it after a rigorous examination of both my circumstance and myself and serious reflection. I'll *do my words*: live in accordance with my words, in alignment with them, or, another way to say it, I'll live with *integrity*. As a practical matter, there will be times when it is not in my, or others', best interest to speak the truth or to do the truth, but there will be a compelling reason for going in this direction and it will be the exception and not the rule. Another aspect of this impeccable words agreement: I'll *keep my word*. If I tell someone I am going to do something, I'll do it. If I tell myself I am going to do something, I'll do it. No excuses, no start-over-tomorrows.

2. To Not Take Things Personally So Much

If people say something to me or about me, or do something with reference to me, that is off base, cruel, unfair, hurtful, anything like that, I'll take it as being about them, not me. It'll be their stuff, their business, not mine. I won't own it, won't wear it, won't take it on as part of who I am or my existence. I don't have to attend to people that are negative toward me or give them power or let whatever they said or did bring me down or hurt me or alter my direction in life. I don't have to set people straight, turn them around, get back at them, or be OK with them. I don't have to let them affect me one iota. Whether anything has an impact on me is my call, not theirs. I don't have to respond in the least to them. I can make them invisible to me. That said, there will be times to take somebody or something very personally indeed, and to respond to it directly, which could include striking back at people and transforming bad circumstances with a warrior's intensity.

3. To Not Be in My Head So Much

I'll work on being better able to deal with the reality right in front of me, right now, to take people at face value and do whatever comes out of that. I won't be so hooked into figuring people out, discerning why they are doing whatever they are doing, seeing things from the their side, factoring in what happened in the past

and anticipating what will happen in the future, having to be so morally upright, and taking care of people. There are times for doing and being any and all of what I have just disparaged, but too often that kind of thing has resulted in me putting up with grief, tiptoeing around instead of acting decisively, wasting time and energy that would be better employed in other directions, and, simply, living less well than I could.

4. To Live More Freely

I'll regularly declare to myself that really, no kidding, I am a free human being. Nothing and nobody owns my mind or body. I'm not a foot soldier in anybody's army. The past, present, and future don't determine me. I'm not obligated to think or be or do this, that, or the other thing because somebody says I am. I am an autonomous, self-directing, one-of-a-kind individual person. I will chart my course in life from this basis until the end of my time on this earth.

5. To Do My Best At Transforming Positive Mental Pictures Into Outer Realities

The question I will ask myself about things that really count to me from now on is, "Am I doing my absolute best with this?" The answer should be yes; there is no acceptable reason for the answer to be no. And if it is yes and things still don't work out, I'll be OK with myself. I'm not omniscient or omnipotent, I can't guarantee the accomplishment of anything; but I've done my best with the task and thus have done all I could do.

And how do I decide what, specifically, to do my best about? Here's where Glasser comes in: He suggests that I create in my mind images, pictures, of good states of affairs--for myself, for those I care about, for my world--and to make external, concrete, in-the-world realities of the ones that have the highest priority to me. That's the thrust, the central core, of my life, bringing good inner pictures to outer existence. Going in this direction involves accepting the fact that some pictures are beyond my capacity to achieve, or they are achievable at too great a cost to others or me or to the larger circumstance. I need to erase those pictures from my mind and put my efforts into creating and then realizing other positive, and do-

able, pictures. Deleting pictures can be very tough to do, because that often involves letting go of involvements and relationships and commitments and hopes that have mattered, and still do matter, greatly to me. But I can do that, and it has to be done.