

The Serenity Prayer “Way of Life”

In "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age", on page 196, it says the following:
"In 1941, a news clipping was called to our attention by a N.Y. member. In an obituary notice from a local paper, there appeared these words: 'God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.' Never had we seen so much A.A. in so few words. With amazing speed the Serenity Prayer came into general use."

As a prayer, this is a beautiful way to talk to our Creator (I have always used the "we" version when saying it because I prefer to pray for more than just myself); but if you really look at it, what this prayer says can also be used as a way of life that can bring about peace of mind in any and all circumstances that disturb us.

It opens by asking God to grant us serenity to accept things we cannot change. I have always thought that this was unusual because it seems to me that serenity doesn't create acceptance. How it's always worked for me though is that serenity comes after acceptance, but who am I to argue. More importantly, it's been my experience that most of the time, the things I CANNOT change are outside of me.

In the next part, we are asking for courage to change the things we CAN change. Now, I don't know about you but I have wasted a lot of time trying to change many things I could not change (that's where the wisdom part comes in handy). It's also been my experience that most of the time, the things I CAN change are inside of me.

Then comes the difficult part - we ask God for wisdom to know the difference between when to make changes and when it might bring peace to only change our perspective of the situation. I have come across two definitions for the word "wisdom" that I like. One is, "the perfect combination of knowledge and love", and the other is, "thinking with the end in mind". Since we cannot know the future, the only thing we can do is know the One who does, and since our Highest Power makes His home within all of us, we can tap into that Wisdom.

Our program enables us to take advantage of this Wisdom because the first three Steps are for bringing us to the point where we become WILLING to turn our will (which is our motivation and our thinking) and our life (which is our actions) over to the care of a Higher Power (or Love), Steps Four through Nine are HOW we turn our thinking and our actions over, and the last three Steps are how we KEEP our will and our life turned over indefinitely.

The Big Book promises that after doing the work of the first eight Steps and also some Ninth Step work that we now have the ability to begin tapping into this Wisdom when it says, *"We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us"*. The Eleventh Step also says that we then can, *"ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while. What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and*

having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it".

Also, something that you may not have noticed is that contained in the Serenity Prayer are the ONLY two healthy options that we have when presented with difficulties. Sure, we could complain, get friends to co-sign our misery or do nothing at all, but these are old behaviors and bring about no solution. Our emotions are nothing more than an inner barometer. When our calm is disturbed, the only two reasonable alternatives that can get us back to our peace of mind is to either do something to change the situation or get a better perspective toward it. THAT'S IT. And the sooner we realize that, the sooner we can get back to our being comfortable within ourselves. That's why it says, "*As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action*" (Big Book, page 87. Please note that agitation comes WELL before anger & rage, and doubtfulness comes WELL before being in deep trouble).

It's important to realize that we need to make being comfortable on the inside a priority because the more uncomfortable our inner experience is, the more drinking becomes an option. When an alcoholic is "*restless, irritable and discontented, they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks*" (Big Book pages xxvi & xxvii). But of course drinking for the alcoholic has negative consequences. Working the Steps and practicing the principles in all of our affairs ALSO bring about ease and comfort, but the results are beyond our wildest dreams! The effect produced by alcohol needs to be replaced by the effect produced by our continual conscious contact with, and followed guidance from, our Inner Guide.

So use this prayer during your morning time with God, when needed or not needed throughout the day, and as part of your "search for serenity". And for those of you who have never seen the full version of the Serenity Prayer, here it is:

"God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change; courage to change the things we can; and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking as Jesus did this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen"

(Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr)

Barefoot Bill