

ORIGIN OF THE SERENITY PRAYER: A BRIEF SUMMARY

*God grant me the **serenity** to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and **wisdom** to know the difference.*

"This prayer has been credited to almost every theologian, philosopher and saint known to man. It was actually written around 1932 by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, as the ending to a longer prayer. In 1934, the doctor's friend and neighbor, Dr. Howard Robbins, asked permission to use this part of the longer prayer in a compilation he was making at the time. It was published in that year in Dr. Robbin's book of prayers.

The prayer came to the attention of an early member of A.A. in 1940. He read it in an obituary in the New York Herald Tribune. He liked it so much he brought it to G.S.O., then on Vesey Street, for Bill W. to read. When Bill and the staff read the little prayer they felt that it particularly suited the needs of A.A. Cards were printed and passed around. Thus has this simple little prayer become a part of the A.A. literature." (From the July, 1961 A.A. Exchange Bulletin)

THE SERENITY PRAYER

"There's nothing new under the sun? Well, perhaps there is the area of material things. Telstar and moon probes are new. As a matter of fact, so is A.A., which celebrated a young twenty-ninth birthday this year. But in the spiritual life, when we make a discovery, we're usually waking up to an old truth.

When the Grapevine last reported on the origin of the Serenity Prayer (January, 1950, issue), we had traced it to Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, who set it down in 1932 in very much the form given above. Dr. Niebuhr said at the time that he thought it might have been spooking around for years, even centuries...

Now an alter A.A. has sent us a clipping from the Paris Herald Tribune of an article written by its Koblenz (West Germany) correspondent: "In the rather dreary hall of a converted hotel, overlooking the Rhine at Koblenz, framed by the flags of Prussian regiments rescued from the Tannenberg memorial, is a tablet inscribed with the following words: 'God give me the detachment to accept those things I cannot alter; the courage to alter those things which I can alter; and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.' These words (are) by Friedrich Otenger, and evangelical pietist of the eighteenth century...'

We don't have the original German of the Koblenz tablet. And we have somewhere a printed card stating that the prayer is a 'soldier's prayer form the fourteenth century.' So there may be more news on the origins of it to write about in the future. But let us not get carried away by antiquarian research, it is the praying that is going to help me, an alcoholic." (From the November, 1964 A.A. Grapevine.)