

Make serenity work for you



HOMEFRONT
CONSTANCE
JOHANNESSEN

"Boredom is the feeling that everything is a waste of time; serenity, that nothing is."

Thomas Szacz

Winter in New England has often been thought

of as the time of hibernation. Spring for planting. Summer for growing. Fall for harvesting.

As a child, I would welcome snow days as opportunities to stop routine and hunker down. Often my grandmother would bake in the back kitchen while my cousins, siblings, and I pieced together a jigsaw puzzle. The comfort inside her home was complemented outside. It was peaceful as the snow blanketed the windows. To me the calm of winter is the metaphor for serenity.

Recently a dear friend informed me that serenity was over-rated. This remark caused me to look more closely at the gravity of serenity. I have tended to consider serenity as healing to the soul. It has also meant a state of calming one's mind by letting go of negative thoughts. Psychologically, inner serenity can be considered the strength we carry into stormy situations, and throughout our normal day-to-day lives.

What is serenity? Random House Webster's Dictionary defines it as the "state or quality of being serene, peaceful, tranquil, composure, quiet, placidity, repose, clearness, calmness of mind and an undisturbed state."

A second definition is: "title of honor, respect, reverence, used in speaking of certain members of royalty."

A well-known guide to understanding serenity is the Serenity Prayer. It was originally written by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) and was later adopted by the AA community. For generations it has touched people's hearts and challenged their sense of wisdom. A current abridged version reads as follows:

"*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.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace."

*AA members tend to interpret God as a higher power.

Niebuhr portrays serenity as the calm state of being that will help us navigate our course. He suggests that with clarity, we can see what we can and cannot control. How often do we struggle with this and get upset with moments we can do nothing about? For example, look at the reactions when flights are canceled owing to inclement weather. Responses often include panic, anger and disgruntled behavior versus accepting the circumstances and settling in.

Serenity, to let go, contrasts with the courage to initiate change during important moments. For example, if your child was being treated poorly in school, it would clearly make sense to muster the courage and

work toward remedying the situation. Serenity is often preferred yet it is not always the wisest choice. We have to develop the skills and knowledge to assess when to correctly choose serenity. Also, serenity can exist despite the turmoil we encounter. To sustain a semblance of calm, we need to appraise how we are affected by identifying issues and realizing areas we need to attend to and which we can let go.

Niebuhr suggests "Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace." How does that occur? Just recently I experienced an event that exemplifies this process. On New Year's Day a small group of us headed north to a lake house. At the edge of the dock, we lit a fire in a smoke pit. The fire was glowing and the lake was calm, with a thin layer of ice. It was quiet. With mixed emotions, we shed the burdens of the previous year. You might say "the hardships." The conversation was of loss, changes, fears and hope. The hardships revealed teachings. In accepting and learning from them, the ability to look forward was possible. The air was chilly, yet we were peaceful. Upon leaving, it was clear that we felt emotionally lighter, more tranquil.

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