Serenity, Entry 1 of 2

Serenity doesn’t mean that we don’t experience dramatic events. It gives us the clarity of mind to go through them.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7: “Living Our Principles”

“Ahhhhh, serenity. A permanent state of peacefulness, contentment, and awe. Those of us with time clean float around on a recovered spiritual plane that newcomers can aspire to and will achieve through doing exactly what’s suggested,” shared no member ever.

Unfortunately—and not surprisingly—life in recovery doesn’t work like that, because life will keep showing up. Thrilling moments, terrifying ones, joyful, and sorrowful. And plenty of unexciting times in between when things are just fine, yet the drama in our head continues. But there is good news on the horizon: we can deal with life because, no matter what arises, we have learned, collectively, that we can get through anything, and practicing serenity can help.

Practicing serenity is acting with intention to get to a place of equanimity where we can contain ourselves enough to keep perspective, show our gratitude, and act with care and thoughtfulness. Sometimes it’s about standing still when our mind is running, other times it’s about keeping our mind still when everything around us is spinning. It can be as simple as breathing. Serenity gives us time and space through extreme highs and lows. It can be the calm in the eye of the addict brain hurricane. But it’s not always about peacefulness; sometimes it’s about authenticity, about feeling how we feel and being okay with that.

Serenity is a tool for clarity. When faced with a difficult decision—which for many of us can be every single decision—we can pray for serenity. Sometimes the right path is revealed; other times we can adjust unrealistic expectations and realize we have enough information to move forward. We can jump into the unknown, because, today, we have tools to deal with that.

Where can I stop, breathe, and look for clarity during my day? Where I can take a moment to feel what I’m feeling and know I’m okay?
Serenity, Entry 2 of 2

The Serenity Prayer is a tool we use again and again in our recovery; considering what we can change and what we cannot becomes increasingly powerful.

—Living Clean, Chapter 2: “Connection to the World Around Us”

The simple binary offered in the Serenity Prayer—sorting between what we can and cannot change—provided quite a bit of relief to many of us as newcomers, especially when our minds were racing. Having this prayer as a new tool in our belt in early recovery enables many of us to muster a bit of courage to work on ourselves, and perhaps achieve just enough serenity to tolerate those around us. Over time, we realize that there is more depth in the Serenity Prayer than we might see at first glance.

Our wisdom to know the difference grows as we accumulate more experience with trying to change our lives. Shouting “ME!” during the Serenity Prayer might remind us to stay focused on ourselves, but many of us soon encounter aspects of ourselves that are not so easily changed. “They told me I only have to change one thing—and that’s everything,” a member wrote. “I had these visions as a newcomer of changing my diet, getting fit, folding my laundry as soon as it dries, achieving enlightenment, and all that. It didn’t take long before I wasn’t feeling very much serenity at all. I had to adjust my expectations.”

If our lives were all knotted up when we first got here, we aren’t likely to get it all untangled right away. Talking to other addicts helps us better see what knots we can loosen now, and what parts of the thread we’ll need to accept—at least for now—while we work on what’s right in front of us. Sometimes a knot gets tighter which can be a vexing part of the process. As our Basic Text mentions, “We learn that we are growing when we make new mistakes instead of repeating old ones.” As we draw on recovery experience—our own and what others share with us—our wisdom grows. Serenity and courage are sure to follow.

The wisdom to know the difference evolves as I do. When I say the Serenity Prayer, I will try to connect with the principles behind it.