

## **STRIVE FOR SERENITY**

By Ellen Harris, LMHC, CEAP

There is no better advice for coping with stress than the words of the Serenity Prayer: "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." These words have become a standard in Twelve-Step programs. And, like many other profound concepts, the simple idea is immensely difficult to manifest in life.

Serenity is defined as "the absence of mental stress or anxiety – a state of peace and quiet." In our fast-paced world, moments of true serenity are rare treasures. How many of us experience tranquility? And, if we are fortunate enough to catch glimpses of this remarkable state of being, why on earth don't we go there more often?

It's easy to make excuses. We neglect our "self care." We are too busy - taking care of others, preoccupying ourselves with responsibilities, and succumbing to stressful annoyances and duties of daily life. We act unconsciously, doing what we've always done. (Have you heard the adage: "if you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you always got!")? We become Human "Doings" instead of Human Beings!

How we care for ourselves when we are not stressed is directly related to our ability to cope with stressful events. Taking as little as 15 - 20 minutes a day to meditate, relax, and quiet our minds lowers stress levels significantly. Our bodies react with a "relaxation response," which is opposite to the "fight or flight" stress reaction. The residual effects of this relaxation are lasting.

Truly, it takes serenity, to accept the things we cannot change, and awareness to realize our limitations. We cannot change other people, or their actions, or the past. We can only change ourselves and commit to going forward and doing our best to create a better future. Interestingly, if WE change OURSELVES and become higher functioning and more "serene" (and this takes COURAGE and WISDOM), the world around us magically transforms.

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