



# a Note from the Nest!

## The Origin of the Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer on our center page is perhaps one of the most influential quotes of our time. Although we credited Dr. Niebuhr, the prayer appears to be well travelled, and many question its origin.

Early in World War II, it was printed on cards and distributed to the troops by the U.S.O. By then it had also been reprinted by the National Council of Churches, as well as being considered the backbone of Alcoholics Anonymous (currently being repeated at the beginning and ending of each meeting). Like most of us, AA was struck by the power and wisdom contained in the prayer's thoughts. "Never had we seen so much A.A. in so few words," Bill wrote. But despite years of research by numerous individuals, the exact origin of the prayer is potentially a mystery that still remains unsolved.

Every time a researcher appears to uncover the real source, another one crops up to question the former's claim and raises new, intriguing facts. Here are a few that might interest you.

What is undisputed is the claim of authorship by the theologian Dr.

Rheinhold Niebuhr, who had written the prayer as a "tag line" to a sermon he had delivered on Practical Christianity.

Some say it came from the early Greeks; others think it was from the pen of an anonymous English poet; some claim it was written by an American Naval Officer. Other sources have been attributed to ancient Sanskrit texts, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and Spinoza. Still no one has actually found the prayer's 'exact' text among the writings of these alleged, original sources. No doubt, what truly are ancient are the prayer's themes of acceptance, courage to change what can be changed and the freedom to let go what is out of one's ability to change.

For instance: An article in the Paris Herald Tribune, said, "In a dreary hall of a converted hotel, overlooking the Rhine at Koblenz, 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 I can alter; and the wisdom to distinguish the one thing from the other." The words were attributed to Friedrich Oetinger (1702-1782).

Other sources say a North German University professor, Dr. Theodor Wilhelm, had acquired the "little prayer" from Canadian soldiers. He had written a book and included the prayer, without attribution, that resulted in the prayer's appearance in many different places, such as army officer's halls, schools and other institutions. Further investigation reveals the professor's nom de plume was Friedrich Oetinger! Same guy!

The Roman philosopher Cicero's Six Mistakes of Man, reads: "The tendency to worry about things that cannot be changed or corrected."

A card, called the "General's Prayer," from a bookshop in England, and found in a New York bookstore, said: "Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, give us Serenity to accept what cannot be changed, Courage to change what should be changed, and Wisdom to know the one from the other; through Jesus Christ, our Lord." It dated back to the 14th century!

Others claim the first form of the prayer originated with Boethius, the Roman philosopher (480-524 A.D.), and author of the book, Consolations of Philosophy. Yes there are other claims, and more will continue for years to come.

In any event, Mrs. Reinhold Niebuhr told interviewers that her husband was definitely the prayer's author, and her husband used and preferred the following form: "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

Dr. Niebuhr told interviewers, "Of course, it may have been spooking around for years, even centuries, but I don't think so. I honestly believe I wrote it myself."

All we have to say here at the nest is Bless him for doing just that! **We know the past has a habit of coming forward to inspire the future** and what better motivation for us today, **to live our lives with loving integrity**, so future generations likewise will desire **to build on our solid foundation!**

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