

December 1957

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## December... today...

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.*

## The Greatest Gift of All

*By Bill*

THE GREATEST GIFT that can come to anybody is a spiritual awakening. Without doubt this would be the certain verdict of every well-recovered alcoholic in AA's entire fellowship.

So, then, what is this "spiritual awakening," this "transforming experience"? How can we receive it and what does it do?

To begin with, a spiritual awakening is our means of finding sobriety. And to us of AA sobriety means life itself. We know that a spiritual experience is the key to survival from alcoholism and that for most of us it is the only key. We must awake or we die.

So we do awake, and we are sober. Then what? Is sobriety all that we are to expect of a spiritual awakening? Again, the voice of AA speaks up. No, sobriety is only a bare beginning, it is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening has to go on. And if it does go on, we find that bit by bit we can discard the old life—the one that did not work—for a new life that can and does work

under any conditions whatever. Regardless of worldly success or failure, regardless of pain or joy, regardless of sickness or health or even of death itself, a new life of endless possibilities can be lived if we are willing to continue our awakening.

Soon after he entered AA, a certain newcomer approached me and he said, "I'm sober and it's mighty near a miracle. I admitted that I was licked, came to a few meetings, began to get honest with myself and my sponsor. Then that awful urge for a drink suddenly left me. There's been no more booze fighting; the desire for alcohol has simply evaporated and I can't yet understand just why or just how. Here in AA the folks are wonderful. They care and they understand. It's a brand new world to me.

"But," continued Mr. Newcomer, "I'm still plumb puzzled. I don't see just how this God-business fits into practical living. And when they talk about a 'new life for an old one,' I can't take it all in. Sure enough I'm sober, and that's new. But now that I've gone ex-grog, what's the matter with trying to live my old life? That was okay, until the liquor got me. I was going places, on the way to make my pile. Things weren't too bad at home, either, until the little woman yelled she'd had enough of me, and left. All I need is sobriety, and AA can keep on giving me that. Now I can go about my business. I'm

sure I can make a better job of it this time."

Four years later, I ran across that same "newcomer." "Well Joe," said I, "Have you made your pile yet, and did your wife come back?" With a half-smile, Joe looked at me steadily and replied, "No, Bill, nothing of the kind happened. For a whole year I had the devil of a time. How I stayed sober was more of a miracle than getting sober in the first place. I had to make that pile and get her back or else I was going to be miserable. And miserable I certainly was. But little by little, I woke up to the possibility that God hadn't put me on earth for the express purpose of getting all the money, prestige, and romance that I could lay my hands on. I finally had to face the fact that I would have to settle for less, a lot less. And if I couldn't accept this. I'd probably get drunk again.

"So I quit giving lip service to AA's Serenity Prayer and really began to use it. Over and over I kept saying, '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.'

"As I slowly learned acceptance, my pain subsided. I began to wake up and look around. I began to see that my modest job was a means of living, and of serving society. The bigger and the better job could no longer be my chief aim. Then I looked at AA. What had I done for

the fellowship that had saved my life? Mighty little, I had to confess. So I began to go to meetings with a very different attitude. I quit my envy of financially well-heeled AAs and listened closely to what they said. I learned that their money was no longer a symbol of prestige; it was a trust for the best use to which it could be put. They also showed me that the temptations of riches could sometimes be worse than the pains of poverty. I also found that there was *no such thing* as an 'unfortunate' AA—that is, if he were a real member. If sick, he was, by fine example, an inspiration to those both sick and well. If poor in pocket, he could often be rich in spirit, an eager worker and servant of our society.

"So I began to understand 'the kind of giving that has no price tag on it.' I threw myself into AA; I joined a church, and threw myself into it. I really began to 'carry the message.' The last three years have been the best in my life. This is because I have really tried to awaken and to grow, and God has helped me to do just that.

"I now see that awakening and growing is something that never need stop and that growing pains are never to be feared, provided I am willing to learn the truth about myself from them.

"The other day an old time AA gave me an example which I'll never forget. Jack is a real old timer. In fact, he started AA in my

town. I used to envy him because he was a millionaire.

"They told me he was in our local hospital, deathly sick, and about to die. In a way, I hated to go there, it would be so sad. When I walked into the room it was filled with AAs all in a gay mood. They were gay because Jack was gay. He was telling funny drinking stories, now and then wiping away the blood that ran down his chin from a cancerous mouth. He sat upright, his legs and bare feet hanging from the edge of the bed. A nurse came in, remonstrating, begging him to lie down. Waving her away, he said, 'If I lie down flat on this bed, I might die now. And that would be too bad, because I want to go to our AA State Convention next week.'

"We saw that this was no bravado; he really meant it.

"A little later Jack again spoke of death. He said that he'd had a wonderful life. Whiskey had brought him great pain but, as a result, AA had given him great joy. With his 'awakening' in AA had come the utter conviction, indeed the sure knowledge, that 'in my Father's House there are many Mansions.' Everybody there could see that to Jack, death was but a fresh awakening. He never did get to the AA convention.

"But Jack knew, and we know, that this didn't really matter for Jack was in full possession of 'the greatest gift of all.' "