



Turning Ourselves Toward Stability And Hospitality, by David Mckee

The Benedictine-Camaldolese monk, Bruno Barnhart says it very well:
“We humans prefer a manageable complexity to an unmanageable simplicity.”

A complex instability is our typical default setting. “Restless with where and how and who we are, we think we need to be somewhere else, or live some other way, or be someone else. “We dream up all sorts of alternative versions of our lives and of our selves, and pursue them, without paying real attention to where and how and who we actually are. “We expend great effort in trying to get “there,” while what we most need to work at is trying to “get “here” — feeling safe and secure in the simple, unmanageable, groundless depths of our own hearts.

And then there is that complex inhospitality that we so often busy ourselves with. “In our efforts to control our experience, we put up all manner of complicated walls, visible and invisible shields, subtle barriers and defenses, all in the effort “to guard ourselves; to protect ourselves against the unpredictable, ever-changing flow of life, both within and without. “Instead of relaxing and welcoming the ceaseless stream of unexpected opportunities that flows around and through us every moment, we exhaust ourselves in vain efforts to bring the stream under our control; we try to make life predictable, manageable, controllable. “As a contemporary Zen teacher puts it with wonderful concreteness: “we stand in the shower under an open umbrella!

The puzzling thing about all this is that we know it. “We all know that things are never anything other than what they are; that how we wish things to be is not how they are. “We all know that we are never anyone other than who we are. “Also, we all know that our life, our experience, is beyond our control; that rarely do we make good things happen the way we plan, and we almost never are successful in preventing bad things from happening. “The umbrella leaks, no matter what we do. “We pretty much know all of this to be true, but, alas, we forget it. “Carried away by our desires, our fears, our ignorance, we forget these simple truths and press on with our programs for improvement and control. “What would help us remember? “The perennial answer is prayer and good works. Sounds pretty simple and pretty wise to me. I see no reason to depart from an answer that has been voiced for millennia by our Christian ancestors and by the ancestors in all the great world religions.

The answer is, in other words, PRACTICE. “Like a basketball player

every day practicing free-throws, or a musician every day practicing scales, over and over, we try to act consciously and mindfully, usually against the grain of our desires and fears. Â Returning to this intention, over and over, we gradually, little by little, turn ourselves naturally toward stability and hospitality. Â Yes, we inevitably fall asleep in forgetting, but we also eventually wake up to moments of loving awareness of ourselves and others. Â Our humility (another key Benedictine value) is in accepting this reality and continuing, however imperfectly. Â When they were asked what they did all day out there in the desert, the desert fathers and mothers used to say: Â Well, we fall down and get upâ€we fall down and get up. In the end, there is nothing special about it.Â

Published at www.awakin.org on Apr 13, 2020