

ARTICLE

Make The Best Of It

By Rev. Master Aurelian Giles

The following article is an edited transcript of a Dharma Talk that Rev. Master Aurelian offered to the community recently.

When I was a postulant, I was in an unusual situation, in that I was given permission to postulate before I had finished paying off my student loan debt. This meant I was still having to go out to work at a job while living as a postulant at the Priory, and I found it very difficult to do.

A monk was visiting us from England around the time when I was close to the point of having retired my debt. I returned from my job one day and started complaining to him with a litany about how difficult I was finding it. When I stopped, there was a long pause, then he looked at me and said, "Well, make the best of it."

We've all heard that saying. But somehow, this time it really struck a chord with me. What he was saying was not simply that I should grit my teeth, plod through, and it will be over soon; rather, it was that I could make the best of the situation that I was in at that moment, and get everything I could out of the situation. Make it my teaching. My Master had told me, "Do not think of this as wasted time or time you are just killing until you become a monk and begin real training." I found this teaching very helpful, and I still do.

Yesterday we recited Sandokai. There is a line that says "Do not waste time." What does that mean? Does it mean always being busy? Always being productive with things? Wasting time doesn't mean always doing something productive, reading the Scriptures, doing my best to improve every shining minute. I don't think it means that exactly. I think it means always doing my best to let go of distractions. Always—when I find myself wandering off—compassionately bringing myself back to my sitting-place. And not just when doing formal sitting meditation, but continually, throughout the day, whenever I find myself wandering off in my mind, bringing my mind and body back to what I'm doing and paying attention to it.

Another line says: "Lo! Hear! Set up not your own standards." One of the ways I tend to wander off in my mind is to start criticizing myself. In other words, I start to set up my own standards. "I should be doing this, I shouldn't be doing that; I should be doing that, I shouldn't be doing this." This is one of the dimensions of Great Master Dogen's statement from Rules for Meditation: "Do

not waste time with this and that." Criticizing myself is a waste of time and is not making the best of things. But my mind tends to go that way as if there are grooves worn in it. Sometimes, I realize I'm judging myself, then I start judging myself for judging! This is just adding a head onto the one I just created. I've learned that the thing to do is this: As soon as I notice I'm going down that road, it's best to just very compassionately, very gently, and very kindly let go of it and return to whatever it is that needs my attention, whether it's sitting in meditation, washing the dishes, or having a nap.

Having a nap can be a very good use of one's time. Resting can be a very good use of one's time. Going for a walk, simply relaxing, working very hard when very hard work is required—all of these can be a good use of one's time. Setting up standards is NOT a good use of one's time. Relaxing into the compassionate arms of the Cosmic Buddha IS making the best of it, and we can do this: letting go and returning to the Source anywhere and at any time of our life, of our day, in this very moment.