

# DAILY WISDOM



365

BUDDHIST INSPIRATIONS



*Edited by Josh Bartok*

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Dedicated  
with boundless gratitude  
to all our teachers  
and to all beings.





## PREFACE

Cited within these pages are representatives from many streams of Buddhist thought and practice: Tibetan lamas and Burmese teachers, Zen masters and tantric adepts, Asians and Westerners, monastics and lay people, poets and pundits. And yet, as diverse as these sources are, their words all point to the same open, compassionate heart and wise, unhindered mind.

Our utmost gratitude goes to the myriad teachers, translators, and editors whose generous efforts have given rise to the original works from which *Daily Wisdom* is drawn. We hope the page-a-day format invites you to spend a few moments of quiet reflection with each excerpt to truly feel the beating heart of these living words. But most of all, in offering this compilation it is our sincere hope that you find encouragement, illumination, perhaps even solace, as you follow your own path deeper into daily wisdom.

Josh Bartok  
on behalf of the staff of  
*Wisdom Publications*  
Somerville, Mass.



## JANUARY 1

"How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"

"By not halting, friend, and by not straining I crossed the flood."

"But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining  
you crossed the flood?"

"When I came to a standstill, friend, then I sank; but when I  
struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that  
by not halting and by not straining I crossed the flood."

## JANUARY 2

There simply is nothing to which we can attach ourselves, no matter how hard we try. In time, things will change and the conditions that produced our current desires will be gone.

Why then cling to them now?

## JANUARY 3

The temptation is to conclude that perhaps meditation is alright for some but dead wrong for you. In my case, meditation started out painful and tedious beyond words. Extremely convincing arguments for giving up before you have even started will almost certainly occur to you—don't listen to them.

## JANUARY 4

When we fall on the ground it hurts us, but we also need to rely on the ground to get back up.

## JANUARY 5

Wisdom does not mean knowledge but experiential understanding. Wisdom helps you to change radically your habits and perceptions, as you discover the constantly changing, interconnected nature of the whole of existence.

## JANUARY 6

We plant merit with our minds, and we commit crimes with our minds. With our minds, we imprint images. This one mind is like an artist. It can draw anything, and what it draws is realized. If you surrender your impressions, ideas, thoughts, and so on at the moment they arise without imprinting them on your mind, your mind will not be tainted, just as the lotus flower is not tainted by the muddy water whence it grows.



## JANUARY 7

This mind and body is our household. If this inner household is not in order, no outer household can be in order.

## JANUARY 8

No matter how hard you pursue pleasure and success, there are times when you fail. No matter how fast you flee, there are times when pain catches up with you.

## JANUARY 9

Try to be reasonable in the way you grow, and don't ever think it is too late. It is never too late. Even if you are going to die tomorrow, keep yourself straight and clear and be a happy human being today. If you keep your situation happy day by day, you will eventually reach the greatest happiness of enlightenment.

## JANUARY 10

On the basis of the belief that all human beings share the same divine nature, we have a very strong ground, a very powerful reason, to believe that it is possible for each of us to develop a genuine sense of equanimity toward all beings.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA, *THE GOOD HEART*

## JANUARY 11

Honesty can be cultivated by transforming your inner language. For example, you might think: "I am no good" or "They are not good." Is this true? For some strange reason, people want to wallow in the idea of being either the best or the worst. What is true in this moment? How close can we get to the reality of our experiences?

## JANUARY 12

BHANTE HENEPOLA GUNARATANA, *EIGHT MINDFUL STEPS TO HAPPINESS*

The present moment is changing so fast that we often do not notice its existence at all. Every moment of mind is like a series of pictures passing through a projector. Some of the pictures come from sense impressions. Others come from memories of past experiences or from fantasies of the future. Mindfulness helps us freeze the frame so that we can become aware of our sensations and experiences as they are, without the distorting coloration of socially conditioned responses or habitual reactions.

## JANUARY 13

Leave the mind in its natural, undisturbed state.  
Don't follow thoughts of "This is a problem, that is a problem!" Without labeling difficulties as problems, leave your mind in its natural state. In this way, you will stop seeing miserable conditions as problems.

## JANUARY 14

There is a well-known simile about a monkey trap of the kind used in Asia—a wooden container with a small opening. Inside lies a sweet. The monkey, attracted by the sweet, puts his paw into the opening and grasps the sweet. When he wants to draw his paw out again, he cannot get his fist with the sweet through the narrow opening. He is trapped until the hunter comes and captures him. He does not realize that all he has to do to be free is let go of the sweet. That is the way we live our lives. We are trapped because we want it nice and sweet. Not being able to let go, we are caught in the never-ending cycle of happiness and unhappiness, hope and despair.



## JANUARY 15

Baizhang asked, "What is the essential import of the school?"  
Mazu said, "It's just the place where you let go of your body  
and life."

## JANUARY 16

All the faults of our mind—our selfishness, ignorance, anger, attachment, guilt, and other disturbing thoughts—are temporary, not permanent and everlasting. And since the cause of our suffering—our disturbing thoughts and obscurations—is temporary, our suffering is also temporary.

## JANUARY 17

It's not enough just to sit down and then, with a totally mundane motivation, proceed into meditation. Rather, among the possibilities of having a virtuous, nonvirtuous, or ethically neutral motivation, it is necessary to bring forth a virtuous motivation, specifically the spirit of awakening for the sake of all sentient beings.

## JANUARY 18

Just as a monkey roaming through a forest grabs hold of one branch, lets that go and grabs another, then lets that go and grabs still another, so too that which is called "mind" and "mentality" and "consciousness" arises as one thing and ceases as another by day and by night.

## JANUARY 19

Remember, lifelong habits die hard. It is difficult enough to simply recognize our anger and jealousy, let alone to make an effort to hold back the old familiar tide of feeling or analyze its cause and results. Transforming the mind is a slow and gradual process. It is a matter of ridding ourselves, bit by bit, of instinctive, harmful habit patterns and becoming familiar with habits that necessarily bring positive results—to ourselves and others.

## JANUARY 20

Zen teachers talk quite often about how you will make compromises when you try to practice on your own. As you are not disturbing anyone else, you don't mind shifting position to get a bit more comfortable—and then shifting again. You may cut the sitting short, then a bit shorter—then end up not sitting at all. But it is your own sitting that you disturb by moving, destroying the effort you've made up until then, by stirring up the mind and the ego. It is yourself that you cheat.

## JANUARY 21

If we divide into two camps—even into the violent and the nonviolent—and stand in one camp while attacking the other, the world will never have peace. We will always blame and condemn those we feel are responsible for wars and social injustice, without recognizing the degree of violence in ourselves. We must work on ourselves and also with those we condemn if we want to have a real impact.

## JANUARY 22

Those who merely read books cannot understand the teachings and, what's more, may even go astray. But those who try to observe the things going on in the mind, and always take that which is true in their own minds as their standard, never get muddled. They are able to comprehend suffering, and ultimately will understand Dharma. Then, they will understand the books they read.



## JANUARY 23

If you never try, you can never be successful; but if you try, you might surprise yourself.

JANUARY 24

The purpose of all the major religious traditions is not to construct big temples on the outside, but to create temples of goodness and compassion *inside*, in our hearts.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA, THE GOOD HEART

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## JANUARY 25

There's but little breath left  
on the boundary of this life and next.  
Not knowing if I'll be here next morning,  
why try to trick death  
with life-schemes for a permanent future?

## JANUARY 26

You can expect certain benefits from meditation. The initial ones are practical things; the later stages are profoundly transcendental. They run together from the simple to the sublime.

## JANUARY 27

Pulling up  
My robes, I draw magic water  
From the spring and let it surge,  
To scrub clogs and headcloth. Smoky  
Haze breaking over fir and bamboo,  
Clears and concentrates  
The mind and spirit.

And what is the wholesome? Abstention from killing living beings is wholesome; abstention from taking what is not given is wholesome; abstention from misconduct in sensual pleasures is wholesome; abstention from false speech is wholesome; abstention from malicious speech is wholesome; abstention from harsh speech is wholesome; abstention from gossip is wholesome; uncovetousness is wholesome; non-ill will is wholesome; right view is wholesome. This is called the wholesome.

And what is the root of the wholesome? Non-greed is a root of the wholesome; non-hate is a root of the wholesome; non-delusion is a root of the wholesome. This is called the root of the wholesome.

## JANUARY 29

Thinking of human beings alone is a bit narrow. To consider that all sentient beings in the universe have been our mother at some point in time opens a space of compassion.

## JANUARY 30

By renouncing samsara, we renounce our habitual grasping, unhappy minds. And by renouncing samsara, we embrace our potential for enlightenment.



## JANUARY 31

It is crucial to know when it is appropriate to withdraw our attention from things that disturb our mind. However, if the only way we know how to deal with certain objects is to avoid them, there will be a severe limit as to how far our spiritual practice can take us.