

first assemble the ingredients

By Ven. Robina Courtin

Every single thing we do in life has to be learned from someone else. How grateful we should be to our parents, friends and teachers! But instead, we take it all for granted, assuming arrogantly that it's their job to show us what to do. The process of learning how to become a Buddha is the same as learning anything.

The steps are the same.

Wanting to learn: I remember the day, the time, the place, when I learned how to make a cake from my mother. It's vivid in my mind. I was 28 at the time, and a hippie. I'd been living in England and went home to Melbourne, Australia and decided that I wanted to make something like a carrot cake.

The crucial first step was that I was ready to learn. This is so important. When we're kids we feel that we've been dragged into learning, that we haven't chosen it, so our hearts are closed. And because we're not doing it willingly, we happily find fault with the teachers, whom we see as forcing information down our throats.

Checking the teacher: So, whom to ask? Clearly my mum was the person. I'd eaten her cakes for

years and knew they were good. I'd checked other cake-makers and was confident she could hold her own. My sisters were excellent cake-makers, and they had learned from her. And according to my mother's peers she was a professional.

And she was a skillful teacher. I knew she had the knowledge, yet during all those preceding years she hadn't forced me to learn. She waited for me to be ready. She had my



Photo: Loris Roulette

Venerable One

for Robina Courtin

By Ken Siegmann

*Shaved head, saffron
robe, electric pink*

*sandals, she chases
Dharma.*

*Smoldering passion
lights her heart the*

*way search lights pierce
night sky and cry*

over here, over here!

*Fire in her belly smolders
in her eyes. Words*

*flatten the horizon,
reveal a rising sun.*

*Grief etches
her face, soothes*

*her searing rage,
leads her down*

*the Noble Eightfold Path
so she can rest*

in the lap of Buddha.

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best interests at heart and knew how to explain the process.

Everything was in place. I was ready to learn, I'd checked the teacher and checked the product. And clearly I had a strong connection with her. So I was completely confident. I went to my mother and requested: "Mum, please show me how to make a cake." How delighted she was!

Committing myself to follow the instructions:

My mother decided that she would show me how to make an apple and walnut cake. She explained what ingredients we needed; the function of the flour, the milk, the eggs, the butter; how to mix the milk into the flour; how to cut the apples; when to turn the oven on; how long to leave it in the oven; how to judge when it was cooked; how to judge if it was a good cake.

Suddenly, for the first time in my life, cakes became real to me. My mother woke me up to cakes. And it turned out beautifully. I haven't made one for twenty years, but I bet I could do it again.

Imagine how ridiculous I would have been if, having done all the checking of the teacher's qualities, having asked her how to make the cake, and so on, I then started finding fault: "What do you mean, two eggs! Why not four?" What a waste of her time and mine!

The main reason my cake turned out beautifully was that, having done my homework and thus having confidence in my mother's ability, my heart was open to her and I was able to hear and carry out the instructions without any obstacle. I received the cake-making empowerment from her.

Imagine, too, if the lineage of cake-making had been lost – that the knowledge had died out with one of our foremothers and that the best we could come up with was a picture of a cake. We'd probably have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on research, experimenting again and again until we came up with what we thought a cake was. And even then, with no one holding the knowledge in their mind of how to make a cake, or even no one with the experience of merely having tasted a cake, we'd still only be taking a shot at it.

Buddha says that every one of us has the innate potential for perfection, to become a buddha, a person who possesses: 1. Omniscience: the all-pervasive consciousness that has the ability to know whatever exists, particularly the minds of all beings, and the ability to know how to benefit them perfectly; 2. Infinite compassion: empathy with every living being as if they were oneself, and the spontaneous wish to take away their suffering and lead every one of them to their own Buddhahood; and 3. Omnipotence: the effortless ability to manifest one's consciousness in countless forms throughout countless universes for countless eons for the sake of countless mother sentient beings.

If we need a teacher to show us how to make a cake, then it goes without saying that we need someone to show us how to accomplish Buddhahood. ☸