



“If you don’t RESPECT YOURSELF, how can you expect others to?”

Our new columnist, the venerable Robina Courtin is an outspoken, tough and fiery Buddhist nun.

Each month she answers your questions concerning Buddhism in a modern world.

This month it’s how to respect YOU!

I remember my mother would say this phrase to me, but I could never hear it. I would desperately want others to approve of, love and respect me, but I couldn’t join the dots between that and my own low self-esteem. In fact, I didn’t know what it meant! It seemed so true that I wasn’t worthy or good enough.

This is the irony of the ego, according to the Buddhist way of understanding the human mind. One of the functions of the attachment that he goes on so much about is dissatisfaction, and mainly with ourselves. No matter what we do, get or experience, we seem to assume it’s never enough: which is another way of saying we’re always focusing on our bad qualities.

Even though we desperately want the approval of others, when we get it, we simply can’t accept it. Ten people can say good things about us, but it falls on deaf ears. One person says a bad

word, and we run like a magnet to it! We believe it totally. What does that prove? That we don’t, in fact, like ourselves.

It’s so sad. In reality, every one of us has incredible potential for goodness, clarity, kindness, wisdom – and contentment. Trouble is, we have to practise thinking like this to counteract the ancient habits that Buddha says we come into life with: low self-esteem, attachment, anger, depression and jealousy.

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For sure, we do get angry, bad-mouth others, make a mess of our relationships, get jealous, and the rest, and need to be accountable for these parts of ourselves. But we end up feeling guilty instead, and this is useless: it’s not about taking responsibility at all. It merely reinforces our low self-esteem, and we believe it’s permanent, and that it is who we really are.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

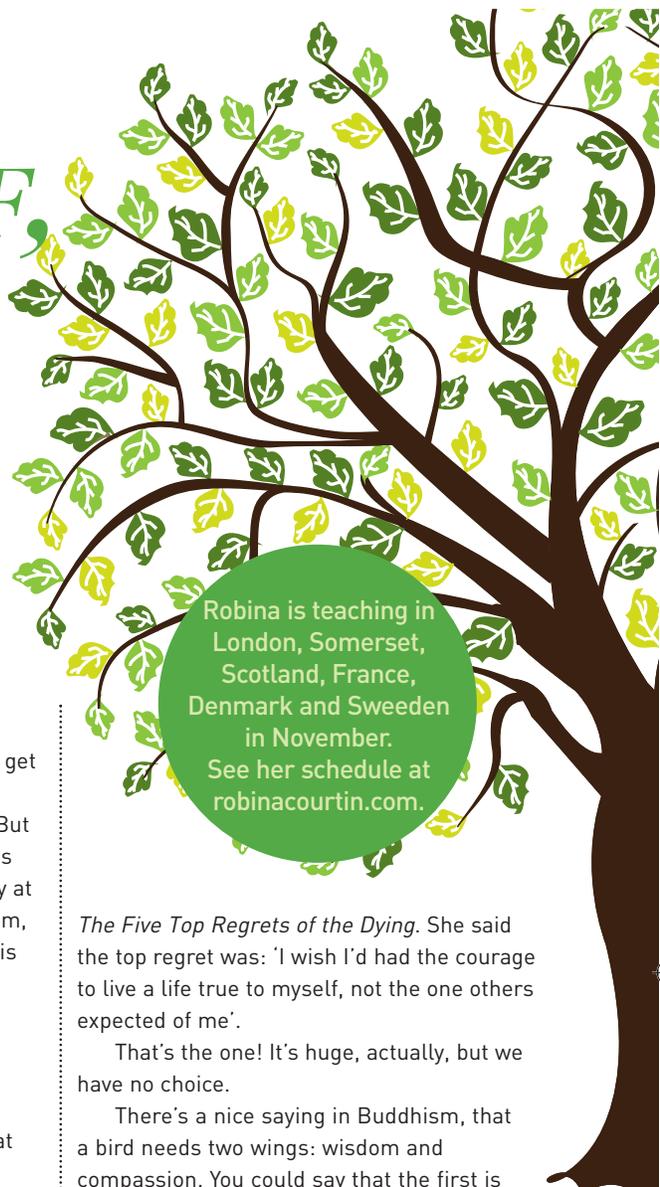
But we also do good things: work hard, forgive others, practise patience, have compassion and show love – so many great things! We have to remember every day, literally speak to ourselves daily, that these qualities are who we really are. As long as we keep buying into the misery, we’ll stay stuck.

Our attachment to what others think is huge in our lives, and the source of so much of our unhappiness. But it’s so, so hard to see: it’s our default mode.

What helps us become strong, and grow into our own true self – which is another way of saying developing self-respect – is

to really know what we think and feel, and to have the courage to follow it, in spite of what others think. In other words, putting more emphasis on what’s going on in our own heads, rather than constantly worrying about what those around us think.

I was very moved when I read in *The Guardian* about the Australian nurse Bronnie Ware, who worked for years with the dying, and who gathered her findings into her book,



Robina is teaching in London, Somerset, Scotland, France, Denmark and Sweden in November. See her schedule at robinacourtin.com.

The Five Top Regrets of the Dying. She said the top regret was: ‘I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the one others expected of me’.

That’s the one! It’s huge, actually, but we have no choice.

There’s a nice saying in Buddhism, that a bird needs two wings: wisdom and compassion. You could say that the first is the point: being useful, lightening the load of others in the world. But as the Dalai Lama says: ‘Compassion is not enough, you need wisdom’. And the latter part of this involves, most simply, developing ourselves, growing our innate potential for clarity, and having the courage to make the brave choices. And how can that bring anything but huge self-respect and self-worth – and a lot of satisfaction and contentment?

BIOGRAPHY



Australian-born Tibetan Buddhist nun Robina Courtin travels the world teaching Buddhist psychology and

philosophy and helping those in need. Well-known for her work for 14 years with people in prisons in the US and Australia, including inmates on death row, Robina’s life and work is the subject of Amiel Courtin-Wilson’s award-winning film *Chasing Buddha*. Visit robinacourtin.com