

Wisdom for psychiatrists

80 per cent is perfection

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The following are derived from instruction on Yoga and Zen.

The psychiatrist asked the Zen Master:

"How do you deal with neurotics?".
He replied simply, "I trap them".

"But how?", pressed the psychiatrist

He replied, "I get them to where they cannot ask any more questions".

Questions are a great intellectual escape from the pathways of personal discovery. People seek to seduce others into doing their work and suffering. Most questions are concealed statements.

If actions, even the best of actions, are accompanied with the thought "I am doing good", the benevolent person may become depressed. For instance, medical teams working in third world countries have greatly reduced infant mortality by giving simple instruction to the midwives. Yet it was found later that the population of the villages had not increased. The reason was that there was not enough food to support any more, so the babies saved at birth died a lingering death of starvation a little later.

Even when actions are completely successful in actualising their hoped-for results, there may be unforeseen and unwelcome effects. Similarly, there are times when apparent failures end felicitously.

A saying of the Soto Zen Sect is, "80 per cent is perfection". They do not explain such phrases, but a parallel comment runs something like this.

"Do things well. But not very well. If you do a thing well, others will see it and think, 'Yes that is a good job, that is what I should have done if I had been doing it'.

But if it had been done very well, they may have doubts whether they could have reached that level. Then some of them may try to find something wrong with what you have done. If they cannot find anything wrong with it, they will try to find something wrong with you. If they cannot find something wrong with you, they will invent something. And that is bad for them. So don't put them in that situation."

"There is also the effect on you. If you have done something well, you finish it and forget it. But if you have done it very well, you are much more liable to begin to think, 'Why, I have done that really very well'. And then perhaps your stride will lengthen a little, and your voice will be heard afar. And that will be bad for you."

"So do things well, but if you do them very well, be very careful too!".

VIIth Joshua Bierer Memorial Lecture

The British Association for Social Psychiatry will be holding its Annual General Meeting to be followed by the VIIth Joshua Bierer Memorial Lecture entitled 'The Social Components of Mental Disorder: Implication for Services' to be given by Professor Brian Sheldon, Professor of Social Work, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College at 7 p.m. at

the London Bridge Hospital on 20 May 1993. Non-members wishing to attend this lecture are welcome and should write, indicating their intent, to Professor A. H. Crisp, Chairman of BASP, Department of Mental Health Sciences, St George's Hospital Medical School, Cranmer Terrace, London SW17 ORE.