

Hans Lobstein

Mind Out - Way Out

The meeting was called to discuss mental health but most of the discussion dealt with mental illness. We saw a film about mental health which showed us some interesting examples of mental illness and handicap and how they can be helped. Half-way through the discussion I couldn't contain myself any longer. We have come to talk about mental health, I said, could we talk about that some time? We have not yet mentioned it at all. Oh, you mean positive mental health, preventive mental health, don't you? No, I said, I certainly don't want to prevent mental health, I want to know how to have more of it. You are just playing with words, they said. Am I?

I sometimes feel I function on 20 or 30 per cent of me and I function well enough but I would like to explore the other bits that are not being used that seem to be dead or slumbering. How can I expand and grow an extra dimension to my joy of life? That's what I want to know.

There seem to be three aspects to this and they overlap. Firstly I want to be more of me, at least 50 per cent if that is not too ambitious. I want to be able to say 'no' without feeling guilty. I want to be more honest and open without being invaded, without thereby causing hurt and anguish either to myself or anyone else.

Secondly I want to be able to cope in an urban society full of tensions and frustrations and setbacks and impatience, having to cross the street and stand up to what is mine. Well, I can either stop wanting what I want or I can become faster and more grabbling—or what else? I want everything, love, anger, comfort, sweet air and no traffic, but much of what I want is mutually incompatible so I have to compromise and find a way through, make my priorities. How can I learn about my priorities? How can I become my own best friend and give myself such good advice? How can I stop being self-destructive, creating situations that only hurt me in the long run?

Thirdly, Freud once said (I quote from memory) that all that can be done is to help neurotic people function reasonably well, coping with work, and that is as much as can be expected. But I want much more. I want to turn frogs into princes, I want a princess who will kiss me and turn me into a prince. Perhaps I am half a prince already. Who, after all, would want to kiss a frog? Even though he may function well enough, in his own froggy way. And now I am told that frogs are preferable to princes anyway, these days, I am out of date, better to be a good frog than an idle prince . . . so where am I now?