

Although these clinical observations are 'mere anecdotes', I believe they are now numerous enough to support the hypothesis that 'fresh' perfumes may significantly affect the well-being of some individuals. A crude extrapolation from this study would suggest that some 50,000 people a year in the UK might be adversely affected by air freshener perfumes. I believe that the onus of proof now rests with the regulatory authorities and the perfume industry who should put forward resources to enable this hypothesis to be tested.

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#### Wisdom

##### DEAR SIRS

I followed with great interest Larry Culliford's series 'Reading about Wisdom' (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, 1991, **15**, 638-639). But having studied the essays I was still not sure what the series was about and would welcome Dr Culliford's clarification on what wisdom is?

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##### DEAR SIRS

The recent series on Wisdom was something of a sequel to an earlier piece in the *Bulletin*, (1984, **8**, 186-187). In this I attempted to answer the question, "What is Wisdom?".

Briefly I began with a conventional definition, acknowledging that it was not entirely satisfactory. ("A recognisable attribute of human beings, reflected in their thoughts, words and actions, derived through intuition and through individual contemplation of ideas, knowledge and experience of all kinds"). I went on to mention Erik Erikson's work on Wisdom as the hoped-for outcome of the life cycle and old age. I made comparisons between wisdom and knowledge, also wisdom and common sense, suggesting that these three are akin but distinguishable.

More recently I have had the thought that wisdom is that to which the heart and mind naturally aspire when one's self-seeking fades away.

The Abbot of a Buddhist Monastery in England said not long ago, "Wisdom isn't something you get, it's something you use. It is not something that you don't have and that you have to get. It's something you start using because it's everywhere; it is here and now. It may even be used in the little things; in just standing, sitting, walking, lying down. It is contemplation, reflection. It is being alert while being and doing."

You may not always feel wise when using wisdom in this way, but that is what it is."

It is difficult to be definitive on the question of what wisdom is. The 1984 article and these ideas may not be fully illuminating. They are simply offered for reflection. Where there is darkness, even the smallest flame may offer comfort.

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##### DEAR SIRS

'Reading about Wisdom' was a satisfying conclusion to a stimulating series (Culliford, 1991). It would be inappropriate to criticise the choice of material recommended in this particularly subjective area. I would, however, like to suggest three additional subjects that may have been included.

Firstly, among the ancient Eastern traditions considered in the series Sufism was largely neglected, despite the ready availability and interesting nature of the "teaching stories" of Idries Shah. Secondly, there is a considerable body of literature describing parallels between psychotherapy and such Eastern theologies, an example being Erich Fromm's comparison of Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis, which could be included in such a recommended reading list. Finally, the Judeo-Christian tradition should not, through familiarity, be neglected as a source of Wisdom.

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- CULLIFORD, L. (1991) Reading about Wisdom. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **15**, 638-639.

##### DEAR SIRS

I entirely accept Dr Hosty's suggested inclusions.

My experience of Sufism is limited, but I have read and enjoyed some of the Idries Shah stories.

In positive comparison to the Fromm book I can also recommend, *Yoga and Psychotherapy: The Evolution of Consciousness* on a similar subject by Swami Rama, Rudolph Ballantine and Swami Ajaya, published in 1976 by the Himalayan International Institute, Honesdale, Pennsylvania.