

Idiom by Lon Yan

不得其法

bu4 de2 qi2 fa3

Doctors in the UK examined the eyes of a 67-year-old woman ahead of cataract surgery, and found under her right eyelid a “blue mass” – 27 contact lenses stuck together.

The case at the Solihull Hospital was recently reported in a professional journal. Curiously, the woman hasn't complained about serious visual trouble, nor serious discomfort in the eye.

She told the surgeons she has been wearing contact lenses for 35 years. Sometimes when she tried to remove a contact from the eye and couldn't find it, she would just think she had dropped it somewhere and put on a new one. In the use of contact lenses, the woman was clearly “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*).

“不” (*bu4*) is “no,” “not;” “得” (*de2*) “to get,” “to obtain,” “to gain;” “其” (*qi2*) “that;” and “法” (*fa3*) “a method,” “a way.” Literally, “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) is “not getting the method.” The idiom means “not to know the right way.”

A student who “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) in studying would not make satisfactory progress. A body builder who trains vigorously but “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) risks damaging his health.

So it is important that we find out the right “法” (*fa3*), or “方法” (*fang1 fa3*) – method – in whatever we are doing. “不得其法” (*bu4 de2 qi2 fa3*) wastes time and energy, and can even bring dangerous consequences.

Terms containing the character “得” (*de2*) include:

得逞 (*de2 cheng3*) – to gain one's purpose; to have one's way; to prevail

得意 (*de2 yi4*) – proud of oneself

得罪 (*de2 zui4*) – to offend; to displease

得益 (*de2 yi4*) – to benefit from; to profit from