



The farmer and his horse

ZEN - STORY

There was once a farmer in ancient China who owned a horse. "You are so lucky!" his neighbours told him, "to have a horse to pull the cart for you."

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

One day he didn't latch the gate properly and the horse ran off. "Oh no! This is terrible news!" his neighbours cried. "Such terrible misfortune!"

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

A few days later the horse returned, bringing with it six wild horses. "How fantastic! You are so lucky," his neighbours told him. "Now you are rich!"

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

The following week the farmer's son was breaking-in one of the wild horses when it kicked out and broke his leg. "Oh no!" the neighbours cried, "such bad luck, all over again!"

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

The next day soldiers came and took away all the young men to fight in the war. The farmer's son was left behind. "You are so lucky!" his neighbours cried.

"Maybe," the farmer replied.

When we interpret a situation as being an 'opportunity' or a 'disaster' it first shapes how we feel and then how we respond.

The story of the Taoist Farmer shows we can never truly know how a situation is going to turn out. The fact is there are no intrinsic 'opportunities' or 'threats': there is only what happens and how we choose to respond. In which case, doesn't it make sense to look for the opportunities in every situation?