

learning for life



This is how the story goes

by Life Coach & School Principal

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There was a farmer who went out into the fields every day with his son and his horse. They worked long hours and managed to scrape by, with just enough to live on. One afternoon, their horse ran away and did not come back that night. Early the next day the neighbours came by offering their sympathies to the farmer for the bad luck and loss of such a valuable work horse. The farmer replied, "Hmmm ... maybe..."

The following day the horse came back and alongside it were three sturdy wild horses. These extra horses would really make a difference in the fields. That evening the neighbours came around congratulating the farmer on his good fortune. The farmer replied, "Hmmm ... maybe..."

The following day the farmer's son decided to tame one of the wild horses. But the horse bucked him off and the son broke his leg and needed to remain in bed for the following three weeks. This set-back could mean they would lose a large portion of their harvest. That evening the neighbours came around again and commented on how unfortunate this event was and the impact it would have on his harvest. The farmer replied, "Hmmm ... maybe..."

The following day three military officers came by the farm to conscript all the young men into the army where they would be shipped off to the war. When the officers saw the farmer's son with his broken leg, they decided he was not fit enough for service and they moved on

to the neighbour's farm. By the end of the day all the neighbour's sons were in the army and would most likely not come home for a very long time (if at all!). The neighbours came over to the farmer, lamenting their loss and the good fortune of the farmer. The farmer replied, "hmmm...maybe..."

How frustrating that the story ends there. I love these kinds of stories where the twists and turns keep the anticipation high and generate a sense of expectation that what one day seems tragic would turn into a fortunate blessing the next. These stories brought a kind of knowing smile to my face. That was until I applied this 'lesson' to my life...

I was on my way to a really important event and my tyre got a puncture. I missed the event (my misfortune) but when I took my car in to fix the puncture, the mechanics found my steering bolts really loose which would have caused a life-threatening accident (now the puncture was my good fortune). Or when I didn't get the job I was really wishing for (and burst out crying because I thought that life was so unfair), and ended up working on another project which was far more exciting.

In each and every event of our lives, we interpret, judge and attach meaning to it. The meaning we make of the event will be a direct result of the information we had at that time. And in that moment, that meaning becomes the 'truth of the matter' to us and we invest emotionally into that meaning. We seem to forget that we 'created' that meaning in the first place. We feel that this 'meaning'

exists outside of ourselves and exists as an independent truth. When I had my tyre puncture, it *seemed* like bad luck because at that time I did not know that my steering bolts were loose. But then again, if I had made it to the function, my car might have been stolen and insurance would have paid out to buy a new one (so the puncture was really my bad luck). So either way, I cannot really say if an event is 'good fortune' or 'misfortune'. Maybe it is, or maybe it isn't.

But how can we go about trying to calculate the infinite possibilities of every event that occurs? An event may mean something today but tomorrow, with different information, it may mean something different. Sometimes it may even take years to see things in a different light and to see how our loss and sorrow in the past are now our growth and gain (especially in our personal relationships).

The trick seems to be able to acknowledge that the meaning you make of any given situation is nothing more than your judgement and interpretation of it, and that you could, therefore, not be attached to that meaning being the absolute truth of the matter. This forms part of being emotionally mature. When things don't work out the way you thought they would, it can be helpful to see this event against the bigger picture of your life.

But then again, this is just the meaning I am making about this subject. Is this the TRUTH? "Hmmm...maybe..." ☺

