

Goldsmith Global

Joel often spoke about Lao Tzu (6th century BC), the Chinese spiritual master and presumed author of the classic Tao Te Ching. This story from Lao Tzu illustrates the detached attitude of a “beholder” that Joel teaches in the chapter “Contemplation Develops the Beholder” in The Contemplative Life.

“Perhaps” — A Story from Lao Tzu

Once upon a time, there was an old and poor farmer in the ancient Chinese empire. But he had the most beautiful horse in the land. The mare was so beautiful that the emperor offered the farmer a treasure for the horse, but the farmer didn't accept. One day the mare ran away.

Folks of the village came and said to the farmer, “You are so unfortunate. You didn't accept the treasure and now you have lost your horse.”

But the farmer replied, “Perhaps.”

Several days later, the mare returned with another horse. The villagers said, "How lucky you are! You had one horse, and now you have two."

The farmer replied, “Perhaps.”

While the son of the farmer was trying to tame the other horse, he fell and broke his leg. Again the villagers came and said, "How unlucky you are! You had only one son caring for you and doing your work, and he broke his leg. Now you will be poorer than you were.”

But the farmer again replied, “Perhaps.”

Several days after the son of the farmer broke his leg, an enemy invaded the country. The emperor conscripted all the young people of the country into the army.

The villagers again came to the farmer and said, "How fortunate you are! Your son was not taken because of his broken leg."

And once again, the farmer replied, "Perhaps.”