

A Lesson in Perception



THE SITUATION

In Washington, DC, at a Metro Station, on a cold January morning in 2007, this man with a violin played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, approximately 2,000 people went through the station, most of them on their way to work. After about 3 minutes, a middle-aged man noticed that there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds, and then he hurried on to meet his schedule.

About 4 minutes later: The violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk.

At 6 minutes: A young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again.

At 10 minutes: A 3-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent - without exception - forced their children to move on quickly.

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At 45 minutes: The musician played continuously. Only 6 people stopped and listened for a short while. About 20 gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace. The man collected a total of \$32.

After 1 hour: He finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed and no one applauded. There was no recognition at all.

*No one knew this, but the violinist was **Joshua Bell**, one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written, with a violin worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Joshua Bell sold-out a theater in Boston where the seats averaged \$100 each to sit and listen to him play the same music.*

*This is a true story. Joshua Bell, playing incognito in the D.C. Metro Station, was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about **perception, taste and people's priorities**.*

This experiment raised several questions:

** In a common-place environment, at an inappropriate hour, do we perceive beauty?*

** If so, do we stop to appreciate it?*

** Do we recognize talent in an unexpected context?*

One possible conclusion reached from this experiment could be this:

If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world, playing some of the finest music ever written, with one of the most beautiful instruments ever made . . .

How many other things are we missing as we rush through life?

Enjoy life NOW .. it has an expiration date!

(Thanks to former Mindfulness student Stephanie Kelly for sharing this.)

Rebecca Stanwyck, LCSW

510-881-2540

www.rebeccastanwyck.com

Pleasant Events Calendar

What was the experience?	Were you aware of the pleasant feelings <i>while</i> the event was happening?	How did your body feel, in detail, during this experience?	What moods, feelings, and thoughts accompanied this event?	What thoughts are in your mind now as you write about this event?
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				
SUNDAY				

When the Horse Runs Off

- a Buddhist parable

Long ago, in a country where the mountains are among the world's loftiest, there lived an old farmer and his son. The boy spent his days attending to the work of the farm and their one old horse—a beautiful white stallion. After years of careful training, the horse ran swifter and smoother than any other in the region. But one day, father and son awoke to find their cherished animal missing.

The son was heartbroken. Neighbors gathered around the two and lamented their great loss. But the father gazed calmly past the villagers to the surrounding high peaks. "We shall see," he said. "We shall see if this is good or if this is bad." After a week, the magnificent horse returned, followed by an equally fine wild mare. Father and son soon tamed the new animal. This time, the neighbors praised the old man's remarkable luck—he was now the wealthiest man in town! He owned the two very best horses! But the farmer simply smiled and remarked, "Oh, of course I am pleased. . .but who knows if this is lucky or unlucky?"



And so it came to pass that one day, while racing their splendid horses across the field, the son fell off and broke both legs badly. While the boy's wounds were cleaned and splinted by the doctor, the villagers bemoaned the family's terrible misfortune. But the father, calm as ever, took comfort in his boy. "He is alive; that is all that counts," replied the old man. "His legs will heal in time. I cannot know if these injuries will turn out to be something good or something bad."

The very next week, a battalion of soldiers marched into the village. A war to the north was underway, and all young men of fighting age were needed immediately. Mothers and fathers gathered food and warm clothes for their boys. With sorrowful good-byes they let their sons join the soldiers.

But there was one boy in the village left behind in his bed—for it was obvious his wounds would take many months to heal. The neighbors envied the farmer's good fortune! Of all the young men in town, his son was the only one not taken to war! The old farmer looked out across his fields at the two fine horses grazing. He looked at the lovely way the sun caught the tops of the jagged peaks in the distance, smiled and said nothing at all.

Parable from Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents, by Sarah Conover (2001) Eastern Washington University Press. Image from Xu Beihong painting, copied from an old wall calendar.