

## 2. Chinese Farmer Story

The *Chinese Farmer Story* is a Zen narrative about **perspective** and **humility**. It has been attributed to philosopher Alan Watts:

Once upon a time there was a Chinese farmer whose horse ran away. All the neighbours came around that evening and said, "That's too bad." And the farmer said, "Maybe." The next day the horse came back and brought seven wild horses with it. And all the neighbours came around and said, "That's great, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day his son, who was attempting to tame one of these horses, and was riding it and was thrown broke his leg. And all the neighbours came around in the evening and said, "Well, that's too bad, isn't it?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the conscription officers came around looking for people for the army. They rejected his son because he had a broken leg. And all the neighbours came around that evening and said, "Well, isn't that wonderful?" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

[\*Alan Watts\*](#) (edited for clarity)

**The moral of the story:** We should be careful labelling the things that happen to us as good or bad. The causal chain of the universe is complex and infinite. Real-life stories continue even after the happy ending.