

魂不附體

hun2 bu2 fu4 ti3

The online stock account of a local bank customer showed a zero balance when there should have been shares valued at several million dollars in it.

Upon enquiry, the bank explained it was only a “webpage display problem” and that it should not have affected the customer’s normal stock trading. The glitch could be due to the system updating.

While it was just a computer hiccup that did not actually wipe out a customer’s assets, it must still have been a very shocking experience for the customer, which could lead to a state of “魂不附體” (*hun2 bu2 fu4 ti3*).

“魂” (*hun2*) is “the soul,” “the spirit,” “不” (*bu2*) “no,” “not,” “附” (*fu4*) “attach to” and “體” (*ti3*) “the body.” “魂不附體” (*hun2 bu2 fu4 ti3*), literally, is “soul not attached to the body,” “body and soul separated,” “as if the soul had left the body.” The idiom means “to be scared out of one’s wits.”

Idiom by Lon Yan

The idiom is used to describe a state of utter fear. Riding an extremely tall roller-coaster could render one “魂不附體” (*hun2 bu2 fu4 ti3*). A student who opens his report card and finds that he has failed in every single subject would feel the same.

A related English expression is “to jump out of one’s skin,” meaning “someone is suddenly surprised or very much frightened by something” (非常吃驚; 大吃一驚).

Fear is believed to cause many physiological damage too, hence the expression “嚇破膽” (*he4 po4 dan3*) - “so scared that the gall bladder burst.”

Terms containing the character “附” (*fu4*) include:

附近 (*fu4 jin4*) – proximity; nearby; vicinity

附和 (*fu4 he4*) – to repeat what others say; to parrot

附件 (*fu4 jian4*) – an annex; an enclosure

附加 (*fu4 jia1*) – to add; to attach