

# 麻木不仁

*ma2 mu4 bu4 ren2*

A man was lying by the side of the road, clearly in great agony after being hit by a truck.

A television reporter came along. Instead of helping, she stuck a microphone in front of his face and started firing off questions, like whether he saw the truck coming.

Why would a person walk in front of a speeding vehicle if he or she had seen it coming, unless the person wanted to commit suicide? But nothing in this case suggested the victim had wanted to kill himself. Tragically, he died from his injuries.

The incident happened in El Salvador, and the footage was aired, setting off a public uproar, and calls for the reporter and the cameraman to be fired. But was the management of the station any better?

Everyone at the station who was involved in the case can only be described as “麻木不仁” (*ma2 mu4 bu4 ren2*).

## Idiom by Lon Yan

“麻木” (*ma3 mu4*) is “numb,” “insensitive,” and “不仁” (*bu4 ren2*) means “not benevolent,” “heartless.” The term “麻木” (*ma2 mu4*) can be used literally to describe a physiological condition, such as the feeling of numbness induced by applying local anesthetic to the skin. When you’ve been sitting in the same positions for hours, your legs will also feel “麻木” (*ma2 mu4*) due to poor blood circulation.

But the “麻木” (*ma3 mu4*) in this idiom is used figuratively to refer to feeling, or more accurately, the lack of it. What has gone “麻木” (*ma3 mu4*) is the heart. So “麻木不仁” (*ma2 mu4 bu4 ren2*) means “apathetic,” “insensitive,” “unfeeling.”

### Terms containing the character “仁” (*ren2*) include:

仁慈 (*ren2 ci2*) – benevolent; kind; merciful

仁厚 (*ren2 hou4*) – kind-hearted; tolerant

仁義 (*ren2 yi4*) – benevolence and righteousness

杏仁 (*xing4 ren2*) – an almond