

Idiom by Lon Yan

自得其樂

zi4 de2 qi2 le4

A man burst into Wong Tai Sin Temple, brandishing a knife. Worshippers scurried for cover as the man started to slash up bunting and attacked a security guard who tried to subdue him.

There are news reports occasionally about bus aficionados stealing buses for joyrides, which is, of course, a criminal offence, not to say dangerous to operate such behemoths without training.

A Headline Daily report showed that there is, in fact, an easier, safer and perfectly legal way to satisfy bus buffs' yearning to drive a bus. The picture showed a man sitting in the front seat on the upper deck of a double-decker bus, holding a steering wheel made of paper, thoroughly enjoying his make-believe experience as a bus driver.

Some might think such conduct childish, but we can also see it as “自得其樂” (zi4 de2 qi2 le4).

“自” (zi4) is “self,” “得” (de2) “to get,” “to obtain,” “其” (qi2) “that,” “his,” “her,” and “樂” (le4) “joy,” “happiness.” Literally, “自得其樂” (zi4 de2 qi2 le4) is “self gets one’s happiness.” The idiom means “to find amusement in one’s own way,” “to enjoy oneself quietly,” “to be content with one’s lot.”

“自得其樂” (zi4 de2 qi2 le4) describes people who are content with small pleasures in life, those who are capable of finding simple ways to entertain themselves.

The same report also mentioned another passenger who was pictured watching a movie on a smartphone attached to the back of the head rest of the seat in front. The set up was rather like the AV entertainment system on a plane, except that you don’t have to pay thousands of dollars for an air ticket to enjoy it. Knowing how to “自得其樂” (zi4 de2 qi2 le4) is a blessing as that is the key to happiness.

Terms containing the character “樂” (le4) include:

快樂 (kuai4 le4) – happy; cheerful; joyful

樂觀 (le4 guan1) – optimistic

樂趣 (le4 qu4) – fun; delight; pleasures

享樂 (xiang3 le4) – to seek pleasure; to live a life of pleasure