

Idiom by Lon Yan

死裡逃生

si3 li3 tao2 sheng1

Waking up from a bad dream is good, because you would be thankful and relieved that the nightmare didn't really happen. Waking up to a bad dream is, however, no good, for obvious reasons.

But that was what happened to 20 or so people who lived in an old To Kwa Wan tenement block, part of which crumbled in the rain, in the middle of the night.

A Mr Chan, who lived in the collapsed second floor balcony-room recounted how he was roused from sleep by loud cracking noises to find an unobstructed view of the street below, because the outer wall has disappeared, a sight that, he said, "even a god would fear."

No sooner had he put on pants and ran out than the floor gave way, leaving the bunk

bed he was sleeping in just a few moments ago dangling in mid-air.

Mr Chan and all other inhabitants of the building were evacuated without suffering serious injuries. Still, their ordeal can be described as "死裡逃生" (*si3 li3 tao2 sheng1*).

"死" (*si3*) is "to die," "death," "裡" (*li3*) "inside," "interior," "逃" (*tao2*) "to run away," "to escape," "to evade", "生" (*sheng1*) "to life," "life," "living." "逃生" (*tao2 sheng1*) is "to flee for one's life" or "to flee with one's life." Literally, "死裡逃生" (*si3 li3 tao2 sheng1*) is to escape from inside death and live."

The idiom means "to narrowly escape with one's life," "to have a narrow escape," "to escape death by a shave," "to have a close shave," "to escape from death by a hair's breadth."

Terms containing the character "逃" (*tao2*) include:

逃避 (*tao2 bi4*) – to evade

逃走 (*tao2 zou3*) – to run away; to flee; to escape

逃兵 (*tao2 bing1*) – a deserter

逃犯 (*tao2 fan4*) – a fugitive from justice; an escaped convict