

Don't Be the Deer

Perception and the Freeze Response - by Sgt. Steve

We all recognize the image of the deer in the headlights. Wide eyes, stiff posture, no movement at all. It has become a symbol for panic.

WHY THE DEER FREEZES

The deer is not stupid. The deer is overwhelmed. When headlights hit, the visual system takes in more information than it can process.

It is not choosing to do nothing. It is waiting for the image to make sense. **While it waits, the threat does not stop.**

Humans respond the same way. The headlights are replaced by bad news, sudden conflict, or financial stress. When those things appear, the mind locks up.

“If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it.”

– Marcus Aurelius

The problem is that real situations rarely slow down for us. If you wait for clarity before acting, you give up your ability to influence the situation.

Every event arrives first as an impression, and those impressions are often exaggerated:

“This is a disaster.”

“I can’t handle this.”

“This is going to end badly.”

Most people agree with these thoughts instantly. The moment you accept the judgment, you surrender to it.

Discipline begins when you pause before agreeing. You look at the situation without adding emotional labels. A mistake becomes a problem to fix instead of a catastrophe.

MOVEMENT BREAKS PARALYSIS

Freezing happens because nothing is changing. **Movement is what breaks paralysis.** The action does not have to be perfect. It just has to be intentional.

Turning your attention, changing your angle, or taking a small first step signals to the brain that you are no longer helpless. Action restores agency.

Do not wait for the picture to be perfect. Change your position and act. That is how you stop being the deer.

Amor Fati,
Sgt. Steve